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Lessons of the War

Being

Comments from Week to Week

To the Relief of Ladysmith

BY

SPENSER WILKINSON

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WESTMINSTER
ARCHIBALD CONSTABLE & COMPANY
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1900

PREFACE

THE history of a war cannot be properly written until long after its close, for such a work must be based upon a close study of the military correspondence of the generals and upon the best records to be had of the doings of both sides. Nor can the tactical lessons of a war be fully set forth until detailed and authoritative accounts of the battles are accessible

But for the nation the lessons of this war are not obscure, at any rate not to those whose occupations have led them to indulge in any close study of war.

Since the middle of December I have written a daily introduction to the telegrams for one of the morning papers. Before I contemplated that work I had undertaken for my friend Mr. Locker, the Editor of *The London Letter*, to write a weekly review of the war.

Many requests have been made to me by publishers for a volume on the history of the war, with which, for the reasons given above, it is impossible at present to comply; but to the proposal of my old friends, Messrs. Archibald Constable and Co., to reprint my weekly reviews from *The London Letter*, the same objections do not hold.

In revising the articles, I have found

but few alterations necessary. My views have not changed, and to make the details of the battles accurate would hardly be practicable without more information than is likely to be at hand until after the return of the troops.

S. W.

March 9th, 1900

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE EVE OF WAR	1
THE MILITARY ISSUES	9
A WEEK'S CAMPAIGN	16
PLAYING WITH FIRE	26
HOW WEAK POLICY LEADS TO BAD STRATEGY	37
TWO VIEWS OR TRUE VIEWS?	47
BULLER'S PROBLEM	56
FIGHTING AGAINST ODDS	67
THE DELAY OF REINFORCEMENTS	75
THE NATION'S PROBLEM	85
MORE AWAKENING	94
THE NATION'S BUSINESS	103
WANTED, THE MAN	112
THE STRATEGY OF THE WAR	123
THE DECISIVE BATTLE	133
SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS	141
THE ELEVENTH HOUR	151
TRY, TRY, TRY AGAIN	160
A COMMANDER	169
CRONJE'S SEDAN	179
THE BOER DEFEATS	187
THE COLLAPSE OF THE BOER POWER	196

Lessons of the War

Being

Comments from Week to Week

To the Relief of Ladysmith

THE EVE OF WAR

THE next six weeks will be an anxious time for the British Empire. The war which begins as I write between three and four on Wednesday afternoon, October 11th, 1899, is a conflict for supremacy in South Africa between the Boer States, their aiders and abettors, and the British Empire. In point of resources the British Empire is so incomparably stronger than the Boer States that there ought to be no possibility of doubt about the issue. But the Boer States with all their resources are actually in the theatre of war, which is separated by the wide oceans from all the sources of British power, from Great Britain, from India, from the Australian and Canadian colonies. The reinforcements

ordered on September 8th have not yet all arrived, though the last transports are due to arrive during the next four or five days. After that no further reinforcements can be expected for a month, so that during the next few weeks the whole strength of the Boers, so far as it is available at all, can be employed against a mere fragment of the British power. To the gravity of this situation it would be folly to shut our eyes. It contains the possibility of disaster, though what the consequences of disaster now would involve must for the present be left unsaid. Yet it may be well to say one word on the origin of the unpleasant situation which exists, in order to prevent needless misgivings in case the first news should not be as favourable as we all hope. There is no sign of any mistake or neglect in the military department of the Army. The quantity and character of the force required to bring the war to a successful issue has been most carefully estimated in advance; every preparation which forethought can suggest has been thought

out, so that the moment the word was given by the supreme authority, the Cabinet, the mobilisation and despatch of the forces could begin and proceed without a hitch. The Army was never in better condition either as regards the zeal and skill of its officers from the highest to the lowest, the training and discipline of the men, or the organisation of all branches of the service. Nor is the present condition of the Army good merely by comparison with what it was twenty years ago. A very high standard has been attained, and those who have watched the Army continuously for many years feel confident that all ranks and all arms will do their duty. The present situation, in which the Boers start favourably handicapped for five weeks certain, is the foreseen consequence of the decision of the Cabinet to postpone the measures necessary for the defence of the British colonies and for attack upon the Boer States. This decision is not attributable to imperfect information. It was

regarded as certain so long ago as December last, by those in a position to give the best forecast, that the Boers of both States meant war with the object of establishing Boer supremacy. The Cabinet, therefore, has knowingly and deliberately taken upon itself the responsibility for whatever risks are now run. In this deliberate decision of the Cabinet lies the best ground for hoping that the risks are not so great as they seem.

The two Boer Republics are well supplied with money, arms, and ammunition, and I believe have collected large stores of supplies. Their armies consist of their burghers, with a small nucleus of professional artillery, officers, and men. The total number of burghers of both States is about fifty thousand, and that number is swollen by the addition of non-British Uitlanders who have been induced to take arms by the offer of burghership. The two States are bound by treaty to stand or fall together, and the treaty gives the Commander-in-Chief of both armies to the Transvaal

Commander-in-Chief, who is however, bound to consult his subordinate colleague of the Orange Free State. The whole of the fifty thousand burghers cannot take the field. Some must remain to watch the native population, which far outnumbers the burghers and is not well affected. Some must be kept to watch the Basutos, who are anxious to raid the Free State, and there will be deductions for sick and absentees as well as for the necessary duties of civil administration. The forts of Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Bloemfontein require permanent garrisons. In the absence of the accurate data obtainable in the case of an army regularly organised into tactical and administrative units, the most various estimates are current of the force that the two States can put into the field as a mobile army available for attack as well as for defence. I think thirty-five thousand men a safer estimate than twenty-five thousand. The Boers are fighting for their political existence, which to their minds is identical with their monopoly of

political rights, and therefore their States will and must exert themselves to the uttermost. This view is confirmed by the action of the British military authorities, who estimate the British force necessary to disarm the Boer States at over seventy thousand men, a number which would seem disproportionate to a Boer field force of only twenty-five thousand. The British forces now in South Africa are in two separate groups. In Natal Sir George White has some ten thousand regular troops and two thousand volunteers, the regulars being eight or nine infantry battalions, four regiments of cavalry, six field batteries, and a mounted battery. He appears to have no horse artillery. In the Cape Colony there are seven British battalions and, either landed or on passage, three field batteries. A part of this force is scattered in small garrisons of half a battalion each at points on the railways leading to the Free State—Burghersdrop, Naauwpoort, and Kimberley. At Mafeking Colonel Baden-Powell has raised a local force and has

fortified the place as well as its resources permit. A force of Rhodesian volunteers is moving from Buluwayo towards Tuli, on the northern border of the Transvaal. There are volunteer corps in the Cape Colony with a total of some seven thousand men, but it is not clear whether the Schreiner Ministry, whose sympathies with the Boers are undisguised, has not prevented the effective arming of these corps.

The reports of the distribution of the Boer forces on the frontiers must be taken with caution. Apparently there are preparations for the attack of Mafeking and of Kimberley, and it is open for the Boers to bring against either or both of these places forces largely outnumbering their defenders. Both places are prepared for defence against ordinary field forces. The actions at these places cannot very greatly affect the general result. Their nearness to the frontier makes it likely that the first engagements will take place on this border. On the other side of the theatre of war the Boers may be expected

to invade Natal and to attack Sir George White, whose forces a few days ago were divided between positions near Ladysmith and Glencoe, places nearly thirty-five miles apart. The bulk of the Boer forces are deployed on two sides of the angle formed by the Natal border, where it meets the frontiers of the Transvaal and of the Free State. From the Free State border Ladysmith is about twenty-five miles distant in a straight line, and from the Transvaal border near Vryheid to Ladysmith is about twice that distance. If the Boers move on Thursday morning they would be able easily to collect their whole force at Ladysmith on Sunday morning, supposing the country contained no British troops. By Sunday, therefore, the Boer commander, if he knows his business, ought to be able to attack Sir George White with a force outnumbering the British by something like two to one.

If I were a Cabinet Minister I should not sleep for the next few days, but as an irresponsible

citizen I trust that the Boers will be shocked to find how much better the British soldier shoots in 1899 than he did in 1881.

THE MILITARY ISSUES

October 18th, 1899

WHEN the Boers sent their ultimatum they knew that fifty thousand British troops were under orders for South Africa, and that for six weeks the British forces in the theatre of war could not be substantially increased. As they were of opinion that no settlement of the dispute satisfactory to England could possibly be satisfactory to themselves they had resolved upon fighting. If we assume, as we are bound to do, that they had really faced the situation and thought it out, they must have had in their minds some course of action by which if they should begin the war on October 11th they would be likely to gain their end: the recognition of the sovereignty of the Transvaal. They could hardly

expect to disarm the British Empire and dictate peace, but they might hope to make the occupation of their country so difficult that Great Britain would be tired of the effort before the moment of success. The Boer defence taken altogether could hope to do no more than to gain time, during which some outside embarrassment might cripple Great Britain; there might be a rising at the Cape, or some other Power might interfere.

If before the arrival of Sir Redvers Buller and his men the Boers could destroy a considerable fraction of the British forces now in South Africa, their chance of prolonging the struggle would be greatly improved. These forces were in two groups. There was the small army of Sir George White in Natal, something more than fifteen thousand men, and there were the detached parties holding points on the colonial railway system, Naawport, De Aar, Orange River, Kimberley and Mafeking. These detachments, however, are largely made up of local levies, and the total number of British troops among

them can hardly amount to three thousand. The whole set might be captured or otherwise swept from the board without any material improvement in the Boer position. Sir Redvers Buller is not tied to the line of railway which most of the detachments guard, and the disappearance both of the railway and of its protectors would be merely a temporary inconvenience to the British. But if during the six weeks' respite it were possible to destroy Sir George White's force the position would be very substantially changed. The confidence of the Boers would be so increased as to add greatly to their fighting power, the difficulties of Sir Redvers Buller would be multiplied, the probability of outside intervention might be brought nearer, and the Army of invasion to be eventually resisted would be weaker by something like a quarter. For these reasons I think Sir George White's force the centre of gravity of the situation. If the Boers cannot defeat it their case is hopeless; if they can crush it they may

have hopes of ultimate success. That was the bird's-eye view of the whole situation a week ago, and it still holds good. The week's news does not enable us to judge whether the Boers have grasped it. You can never be too strong at the decisive point, and a first-rate general never lets a single man go away from his main force except for a necessary object important enough to be worth the risk of a great failure. The capture of Mafeking, of Kimberley, and even of Mr. Cecil Rhodes, would not compensate the Boers for failure in Natal. Neither Colonel Baden-Powell nor Colonel Kekewich would be likely to make a serious inroad into Boer territory. I should therefore have expected the Boers merely to watch these places with parties hardly larger than patrols and to have thrown all their energy into a determined attack on Sir George White. But they seem to have sent considerable bodies, in each case several thousand men, against both Mafeking and Kimberley. This proves either that they have a superabundance of force at their

disposal or that they have failed to grip the situation and to concentrate their minds, their will, and their troops upon the key of the whole position. I believe the latter to be the true interpretation.

If the cardinal principle is to put all your strength into the decisive blow, its corollary is that you should deliver the blow as soon as you can, for in war time is as precious as lives. Here again it is not easy to judge whether the Boer Commander-in-Chief is fulfilling his mission. When the ultimatum expired his forces were spread along the border line of the Free State and the Transvaal, so that a forward movement would concentrate them in the northern triangle of Natal. The advance has not been resisted, and at the end of a week the Transvaal wing of the combined army has reached a point a few miles north of Glencoe, while the bulk of the Free State wing is still behind the passes. The movement has not been rapid, but as the ground is difficult—marches through a mountainous

country and in bad weather always take incomparably longer than is expected—the delay may be due not to lack of energy but to the inevitable friction of movement. The mere lapse of time throws no light on the Boer plan, for though sound strategy counsels rapidity in the decisive blow, rapidity is a relative term, the pace varying with the Army, the country, and the weather.

Sir George White's object is not merely to make the time pass until Sir Redvers Buller's forces come upon the scene. He has also to prevent the Boers from gaining any great advantage, moral or material. Time could be gained by a gradual retreat, but that would raise the courage of the Boer party, and depress the spirits of the British. Accordingly Sir George White may be expected to take the first opportunity of showing the Boers that his men are fighters, but he will avoid an engagement such as might commit a fraction of his force against the Boer main body. The detachment which was a few days ago near Glencoe may be expected, as

the Boer advance continues, to act as a rear guard, of which the business is to delay the enemy without running too great a risk of being itself cut off, or as an advance guard, which is to be reinforced so soon as the general drift of the Boer movements has been made out. The next few days can hardly pass without an engagement in this quarter of Natal, and the first serious engagement will throw a flood of light upon the aims of both generals and upon the quality of the troops of both sides. Meantime the incidents of last week, the wreck of the armoured train, and the attacks which have probably been made upon Mafeking and Kimberley, are of minor importance.

A very serious piece of news, if it should be confirmed, is that the Basutos have begun to attack the Free State. The British authorities have exerted themselves to the utmost to prevent this and to keep the Kaffir population quiet. The mere fact of the existence all over South Africa of a Kaffir population outnumbering Boers

and British together made it an imperative duty of both white races to come to a peaceful settlement. This was as well known to the Boers as to the British, and forms an essential factor in any judgment on the action which has caused and precipitated the conflict.

A WEEK'S CAMPAIGN

October 25th, 1899

The Boer Commander-in-Chief has beyond doubt grasped the situation. His total force seems to be larger than was usually expected and to exceed my own rough estimate of thirty-five thousand men, the balance to his advantage being due probably to the British efforts to keep the Basutos from attacking the Free State. Thus the Boers have been able to overrun their western and southern borders in force sufficient to make a pretence of occupying a large extent of territory in which only the important posts specially prepared by the British for defence continue to hold out. Of

these posts, however, Mafeking and Kimberley are as yet the only ones that have been attacked or threatened.

For operations in the northern corner of Natal the Boer commander was able to collect some thirty thousand men, who on the eve of hostilities were posted in separate columns upon the various routes leading from the Free State and from the Transvaal into the triangle of northern Natal. This triangle is like a letter *A*, the cross-stroke being the range of hills known as the Biggarsberg, which is intersected near the centre on a north and south line by the head-stream of the Waschbank River forming a pass through which run the railway and the Dundee-Ladysmith road. North of the Biggarsberg the gates of the frontier are Muller's Pass, Botha's Pass, the Charlestown road, Wool's Drift, and De Jager's Drift, of which Landman's Drift is a wicket-gate. At each of these points, except perhaps Muller's Drift, of which I have seen no specific mention, the Boers had a column

waiting. South of the Biggarsberg are on the east Rorke's Drift, and on the west the passes of Ollivier's Hoek, Bezuidenhout, Tintwa, Van Reenen, De Beers, Bramkock, and Collins. At all these points there were Boer gatherings, though on the west the Free Staters, having their headquarters at Albertina, were likely to put their main column on the road leading through Van Reenen's Pass to Ladysmith.

By Thursday morning the Boer advance had developed. The columns from Botha's Pass, Charlestown, and Wool's Drift had advanced through Newcastle, where they had converged, and moved south along the main road. The Landman's Drift column had moved towards Dundee, the Rorke's Drift column had pushed some distance towards the west, and the forces from Albertina had showed the heads of their columns on the Natal side of the passes.

The British force was divided between Dundee and Ladysmith. The Biggarsberg range, the cross-line of the A, is about fifty miles long. It

is traversed from north to south by three passes. In the centre runs the railway through a defile. Twelve miles to the west of the railway runs the direct Newcastle-Ladysmith road; eight miles to the east runs the road Newcastle-Dannhauser-Dundee-Helpmakaar. A third road runs from De Jager's Drift through Dundee to Glencoe and thence follows the railway to Ladysmith. Dundee is about five miles from Glencoe on a spur of the Biggarsberg range. Between the two places by the Craigie Burn was the camp of Sir Penn Symons, who had under him the eighth brigade (four battalions), three batteries, the 18th Hussars, and a portion of the Natal Mounted Volunteers, in all about four thousand men. Thirty-five miles away at Ladysmith, the junction of the Natal and Free State railways, as well as of the Natal and Free State road systems, Sir George White had a larger force, the seventh brigade, three field batteries, a mountain battery, the Natal battery, two or three cavalry regiments, the newly-raised Imperial

Light Horse, and some Natal Mounted Volunteers. It is not clear whether there were more infantry battalions and it seems probable that one battalion and perhaps a battery were at Pietermaritzburg. The Ladysmith force was at least six thousand five hundred strong, and its total may have been as high as eight thousand.

The Boer plan was dictated by the configuration of the frontier and of the obstacles and communications in Northern Natal. The various columns to the north of the Biggarsberg had only to move forward in order to effect their junction on the Newcastle-Dundee road, and their advance southwards on that road would enable them at Dundee to meet the column from Landman's Drift. The movement, if well timed, must lead to an enveloping attack upon Sir Penn Symons, whose brigade would thus have to resist an assault delivered in the most dangerous form by a force of twenty thousand men. From the point of view of the Boer Commander-in-Chief, the danger was that the Glencoe and

Dundee force should escape his blow by retiring to Ladysmith, or should be reinforced by the bulk of the Ladysmith force before his own combined blow could be delivered. It was essential for him to keep Sir George White at Ladysmith and also to cut the communications between Glencoe and Ladysmith. Accordingly, on Wednesday, the 18th, the Free State forces from Albertina, the heads of whose columns had been shown on Tuesday, moved forward towards Acton Homes and Bester's Station, and led Sir George White to hope for the opportunity to strike a blow at them on Thursday, the 19th. At the same time a detachment from the main column was pushed on southwards, and was able on Thursday, while Sir George White was watching the Free State columns, to reach the Glencoe-Ladysmith line near Elandslaagte, to break it up, and to take position to check any northward movement from Ladysmith. Everything was thus ready for the blow to be struck at Dundee, but by some want of concert the combination was imperfect.

On Friday morning the Landman's Drift column, which had been reinforced during the previous days by a part of the Newcastle column, was in position on the two hills to the east of Dundee, and began shelling the British camp at long range. At the same time the column from the north was within an easy march from the British position. Sir Penn Symons decided promptly to attack the Landman's Drift column and to check the northern column's advance. Three battalions and a couple of batteries were devoted to the attack of the Boer position, while a battalion and a battery were sent along the north road to delay the approaching column. Both measures were successful. The attack on the Boer position of Talana or Smith's Hill was a sample of good tactical work, in which the three arms, or if mounted infantry may be considered a special arm, the four arms, were alike judiciously and boldly handled. The co-operation of rifle and gun, of foot and horse, was well illustrated, and the Boer force was after

a hard fight driven from its position and pursued to the eastward. Unhappily, Sir Penn Symons, who himself took charge of the fight, was mortally wounded at the moment of victory, leaving the command of the force in the hands of the brigadier, Lieut.-Colonel Yule. The northern Boer column seems to have disappeared early in the day. Possibly only its advance guard was within striking distance and had no orders to make an independent attack on the British delaying force.

On Saturday morning Sir George White sent a small force of cavalry and artillery to reconnoitre along the line of the interrupted railway. Some two thousand Boers were found in position near Elandslaagte, and accordingly during the day the British were reinforced by road and rail from Ladysmith, until in the afternoon the Boer position could be attacked by two battalions, three batteries, two cavalry regiments, and a regiment and a half of mounted infantry—about three thousand five hundred men. The Boers

were completely crushed and a large number of prisoners taken, including the commander and the commanding officer of the German contingent. The British loss, however, as at Glencoe, was heavy, especially in officers. The force returned on Sunday to Ladysmith.

The British force at Dundee-Glencoe was thus still isolated, and until now no detailed account of its movements has reached England. On Saturday it was again attacked and, there is reason to believe, it again repulsed a large Boer force, probably the main northern column. On Sunday also the attack seems to have been renewed, this time apparently by two columns, one of which may have been composed of Free State troops from Muller's Pass. Either on Sunday or Monday General Yule determined to withdraw from a position in which he could hardly hope without destruction to resist the overwhelming numbers brought to bear against him, especially as the Boer forces, either from the direction of Muller's Pass or from Bester's

Station, were threatening his line of retreat by the Glencoe-Ladysmith road. Accordingly, leaving in hospital at Dundee those of his wounded who could not be moved, he retired along the Helpmakaar road, which he followed as far as Beith, about fourteen miles from Dundee, and near there he bivouacked on Monday night. On Tuesday he continued his march from Beith towards Ladysmith, expecting to reach Sunday's River, about sixteen miles, by dark. Sir George White, informed of this movement and of the presence of a strong Boer force to the west of the Ladysmith-Glencoe road, set out on Tuesday morning to interpose between this force and General Yule, and by delivering a smart attack at Reitfontein was able for that day to cover the retreat of General Yule's brigade.

The Boer Commander-in-Chief has thus, apparently, failed in his attempt to crush one wing of the British force, and has accomplished no more than bringing about its return to the main body, which must have been a part of the original

British plan, unless it was thought that a British brigade was capable of defeating four times its own number of Boers.

The net result hitherto seems to be that the Boers have had the strategical and the British the tactical advantage. The British troops have proved their superiority; the Boers have shown that even against troops of better training, spirit, and discipline, numbers must tell, especially if directed according to a sound though not always perfectly-executed plan.

PLAYING WITH FIRE

November 1st, 1899

THE first week's campaign, dimly seen through scanty information, gives a peculiar impression of the two armies. The British force seems like an athlete in fine training but without an idea except that of self-preservation, while the Boer army resembles a burly labourer, clumsy in his move-

ments; but knowing very well what he wants. The British force at first is divided upon a front of forty miles, each of its halves looking away from the other, so that there is little attention to the weak point of such a front, the communication between its parts. The first event is the cutting of this communication (on the 19th), and not until the 21st is there an attempt to clear it, and that attempt, though it leads to a severe blow against the interposing Boer force (Elandslaagte), is not successful, for the communication has eventually to be sought on another route behind the direct one. The Boer idea is, after severing the connection between the British halves, to crush the weaker Dundee portion; but the execution is imperfect, so that Sir Penn Symons has the opportunity, which he seizes instantly, to defeat and drive off one of the columns before the other can assist it. His successor, General Yule, the heir to his design, is no sooner convinced by this move to Glencoe that his line of junction with Ladysmith is threatened with attack by a great superiority than he sets out by the nearest way

still open to him to rejoin the main body. The Ladysmith force covers this march by a shielding movement (Reitfontein) and the junction of the two British halves is effected. From Dundee to Ladysmith is forty miles, and General Joubert unopposed would have covered the distance in three days. He was before Dundee on Saturday, the 21st, and there was no sign of him before Ladysmith until Saturday, the 28th, or Sunday, the 29th. The original division of the British force and the Battle of Glencoe thus produced a delay of several days in the Boer advance: more could not have been expected from it. This first impression ought to be supplemented by a consideration of Sir George White's peculiarly difficult position, on which I will venture a word or two.

The Government, by its action in the first half of September, decided that Sir George White must defend Natal for about five weeks* with sixteen thousand men against the bulk of the

* Thirteen weeks, as we now (March) know from the official correspondence.

Boer army, which was likely to be double his own force. It was evidently expected that he should hold his ground near Ladysmith and thereby cover Natal to the south of the Tugela. This double task was quite disproportionate to his force. If Ladysmith had been a fortress, secure for a month or two against assault, and able to take care of itself, the field force using it as a base could no doubt have covered Natal. But in the absence of a strong place there were only two ways by which a small force could delay the Boer invasion. The force might let itself be invested and thereby hold a proportion of the Boer army, leaving the balance to raid where it could, or the campaign must be conducted as a retreat from position to position. For a general with ten thousand men and only two hundred miles of ground behind him to carry on a retreat in the face of a force double his own so as to make it last five weeks and to incur no disaster would be a creditable achievement. Sir John Moore is thought to have shown judg-

ment and character by his decision to retreat before a greatly superior force, commanded it is true by Napoleon himself. Moore when he decided to retreat was about as far from Corunna as Dundee is from Durban, and Moore's retreat took nineteen days. He had the sympathy if not the effective help of the population, and was thought to have been clever to get out of the trap laid for him. Sir George White seems to have been expected as a matter of course to resist the Boer army, to prevent the overrunning of Natal by the Boers, and to preserve his own force from the beginning of October to the middle of November.* The Government expected the Boers to attack as soon as they should hear of the calling out of the Reserves, that being the reason why the Reserves were not called out earlier. Therefore Sir George White's campaign was timed to last from October 9th to November 15th (December 15th). I conclude that the force to be given to Sir George White was fixed

* I should have said December.

by Lord Lansdowne at haphazard, and that the calculations of the military department were put on one side, this unbusinesslike way of playing with National affairs and with soldier's lives being veiled from the Secretary of State's mind by the phrase, "political reasons." But the "political reason" for exposing a Nation's troops to unreasonable risks and to needless loss must be bad reason and bad policy. Mr. Wyndham has had the courage to assert that there was no haphazard, that his chief knew quite well what he was doing, and that "the policy which the Government adopted was deliberately adopted with the fullest knowledge of possible consequences." If these words in Mr. Wyndham's speech of October 20th mean anything, they mean that Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Wyndham intended Sir George White to be left for a month to fight against double his number of Boers; that they looked calmly forward to the terrible losses and all the risks inseparable from such conditions. That being the case, it seems to me

that it is Mr. Wyndham's duty, and if he fails, Lord Lansdowne's duty, to tell the country plainly whether in that deliberate resolve Lord Wolseley was a partner or an overruled protester. Ministers have a higher duty than that to their party. The Nation has as much confidence in Lord Rosebery as in Lord Salisbury and the difference in principle between the two men is a vanishing quantity. A change of ministry would be an inconvenience, but no more. But if the public comes to believe, what I am sure is untrue, that the military department at the War Office has blundered, the consequences will be so grave that I hardly care to use the word which would describe them.

I accept the maxim that it is no use crying over spilt milk or even over spilt blood, but the maxim does not hold when the men whose decision seems inexplicable are in a position to repeat it on a grander scale. The temper of the Boers as early as June left no doubt in any South African mind that if equality of rights and

British supremacy were to be secured it would have to be by the sword. The Government alone among those who cared for the Empire failed to realise this in time. That has been admitted. The excess of hope for peace has been condoned and is being atoned for on the battlefields of Natal. But to-day the temper of Europe leaves no room for doubt that, in case of a serious reverse in Natal, Europe if it can will interfere. Have Mr. Goschen and Lord Landsdowne worked out that problem, or is there to be a repetition in the case of the continental Powers —an adversary very different from the Boers —of patience, postponement, and haphazard? It is not the situation in South Africa that gives its gravity to the present aspect of things, but the situation in Europe. Upon the next fortnight's fighting in Natal may turn the fate not merely of Natal and of South Africa, but of the British Empire. That this must be the case was plain enough at Christmas, and has been said over and over again. Yet this was the crisis

which was met by sending to the decisive point a reinforcement of ten thousand men to do the best they could along with the six thousand already there during a five weeks' campaign.

After reconnaissance on Friday and Saturday (October 27th-8th) Sir George White, finding a large Boer force in front of him at Ladysmith, determined to hit out on Monday. Suppose Ladysmith to be the centre of a compass card, the Boers were spread across the radii from N. to E. Sir George meaning to clear the Boers from a position near N.E. prepared to move forward towards N.E. and towards E., sending in each direction about a brigade of infantry and a brigade division of field artillery. He sent two battalions and a mounted battery towards N. The party sent to N. started after dark on Sunday; the other parties, making ready in the night, set forward at dawn. There was no enemy in position at N.E. The force sent towards E. pushed back a Boer force, which retreated only to enable a second Boer force to

take the British E. column in flank—apparently its left flank. The N.E. column had to be brought up to cover the retirement of the E. column. When these two columns returned to Ladysmith the N. column was still out. Long after dark Sir George White learned that the N. column, which had lost its battery and its reserve rifle ammunition by a stampede of the mules, had been surrounded by a far stronger Boer force, had held its ground until the last cartridge was gone, and that then the survivors had accepted quarter and surrendered.

Sir George White manfully takes upon himself the blame for this misfortune. His portentous blunders were in sending out the party to a distance and in taking no steps to keep in communication with it or to support it. The detachment of a small party to a distant point is a habit of Indian warfare. It is out of place against an enemy of European race, for the detachment is sure to be destroyed if the enemy has a capable commander. Every man in the

Ladysmith force will have felt on Tuesday that the commander had make mistakes which he ought not to have made. The question is what effect this consciousness will have upon the spirits of the force.

Sir George White was reinforced before and during the action, a battalion of rifles having arrived in the morning and a party of bluejackets with heavy quick-firers coming up during the day. Further reinforcements were sent towards him from the squadron after the action, so that his force is still about sixteen thousand. If he does not elect to retreat, a course which might demoralise the troops, he may well be able to defend Ladysmith until relieved; but the first business of the troops now on their way out will be to relieve him, and until that has been arranged for, it is to be feared that Mafeking and Kimberley must wait.

HOW WEAK POLICY LEADS TO BAD STRATEGY

November 8th, 1899

THE war is doing us good. It is giving us the beginnings of political education in a department that has been utterly neglected. It may be worth while to review the whole situation of to-day, and to ask how the man in the street can lend a helping hand.

The British Government, primarily representing the people of Great Britain, has for many years been an affair of party; the dominant idea of the party leaders has been when out of office to get in, and when in to stay. The way to manage this was to cajole the man in the street, and as he was a busy man getting his living and not much concerned about watching the whole globe, the party leaders made bids for his support; votes to be distributed on the principle that one man was as good as another; taxation to be made light for him, and, consequently, as the money had to be found, heavy

for some one else. Each party offered what it sincerely believed to be for the general good; but the kind of general good thought of was the personal improvement or comfort of each individual or of a mass of individuals. While this was going on in British towns and counties, something was happening on the neglected globe. There was a large part of the British Nation living on other continents without votes in any British town or county, yet looking to the British Government to champion something they loved, which has come to be called the Empire. There were also great nations emulating the British in the notion that the world was their inheritance, and that they would take possession of a fair share of it. Their quarrels had driven them to perfect their armies and to build navies. Each of them was annoyed to find that in the scramble for the heritage some one had been before them. On the best plots the British flag was flying, yet Great Britain had not much Army and was very careless about her Navy. The strong powers began to elbow her a little. The

British Government was not disturbed by these hints from the globe. A Government made by a Parliament in which every member represented a town or a county or a scrap of a town or county, and in which no one represented the Nation, no one the Empire, and no one the Globe, felt bound to keep its eye upon towns and counties, the Opposition benches, and the next election. Why should it stand up for the British outside, and why concern itself about other Powers looking round the globe for claims to peg out? The colonists who looked to the British Government for championship were snubbed; the foreign Powers working for elbow-room were politely made way for, or if they brushed against the British coat-sleeve and caused an exclamation received a meek apology. This was the normal frame of mind of British party leaders and ministers, from which they have never quite emerged. They were asleep, dreaming of a parochial millennium.

But outside of cabinets there were a few men

who used their eyes. Sir Charles Dilke took a turn round the globe, and when he came back said "Greater Britain." That was an idea, and ideas are like the plague—they are catching. Sir John Seeley took a tour through the history of the last three centuries, and said "Expansion of England"; that meant continuity in the Nation's life not merely in space but in time. Whatever the cause, a few years ago there set in an epidemic of fresh ideas, tending to reveal the Nation as more than a crowd of individuals and the Empire as the Nation's work and the Nation's cause. The Government did all it could to resist the infection. Instead of standing up for the Empire it was bent on passing measures in the sense of its own party. It ran away from Russia, from France, and from Germany. But the new ideas grew; every globetrotter became a Nationalist and an Imperialist, and shed his party skin. Then came Fashoda, and Lord Rosebery's action in that matter killed what was left of party.

The case of the British in South Africa cried aloud for British action. But the Government was still hidebound in bad traditions, thinking that democracy means the tail wagging the dog, not seeing that if the statesman leads straight along the path of duty the Nation is sure to follow him. Happily, a statesman was sent to Cape Town, probably because the Cabinet hardly realised how big a man he was. Sir Alfred Milner mastered his case, thought out his cause, and at the opportune moment put it before the Government. The first result was the Bloemfontein conference. There, with the prescience and the strength of a Cavour or a Bismarck, Milner put the issue: either the minimum concession which will secure the political equality of the two races or war. Kruger's obstinate refusal of the concessions required showed plainly that it would be war. There was only one possible way of averting war; if fifty thousand men had been at once sent to South Africa,

Kruger and his people would have known where they were, and might have accepted possible terms, those offered at Bloemfontein. The moment of the breaking off of the conference was the crisis, and to appreciate men you must watch them in a crisis. Mr. Balfour expressed his unbounded confidence in Kruger's sweet reasonableness and in the justice of the British cause; he could not believe there would be war. Mr. Chamberlain entered into ambiguous negotiations, beginning in a way that made everyone, especially Kruger, imagine that the Government would accept less than the Bloemfontein minimum. Of preparing to coerce the Boers there was no sign. The Boers began to get their forces in order. In England big speeches were made; "hands" were "put to the plough"; but at the end of July no military force was made ready. At length, when Natal appealed for protection against the Boer army, ten thousand men were ordered so as to bring up the garrison

of the colony to some seventeen thousand. After the ten thousand not another man was sent until October 20th.

The present situation is the necessary outcome of the Government's action between the beginning of June and October 7th, when the orders for calling out the Reserves and for mobilisation were issued. The Cabinet's decisions involved that Sir George White with his small force should have to bear the brunt of the Boer attack from the outbreak of hostilities until the time when the Army Corps should be landed and ready to move. That was at least five weeks* of which three have elapsed, and in the three weeks Sir George White, after one or two initial mishaps of no great consequence by themselves, is invested at Ladysmith, while Mafeking and Kimberley are waiting for relief, and the Free State Boers are invading the northern provinces of Cape Colony and trying to enlist the doubtful Dutch farmers. This is not a pleasant situation

* We now know that the time was thirteen weeks.

for the Nation that declares itself the paramount Power in South Africa. Three questions may be discussed with regard to it: What are the risks still run, what are the probabilities, and how can we help to prevent such a situation from recurring?

To see what has been risked on the chance that the force under Sir George White may hold its own we must look from the Boer side. The Boer commander hopes, or ought to hope, to destroy Sir George White's force before it can be relieved. He has a chance of succeeding in this, for an investing force has with modern arms a great advantage over the force it surrounds. The outside circle is so much larger than the inside one that it can bring many more rifles into play; it exposes no flanks, and the interior force cannot attack it without exposing one or both flanks. With anything like equal skill and determination the surrounding force is sure to win in time. But if the time is limited the surrounding force must hurry the result by

assaults, in which it loses the advantage of the defensive. If Joubert and his men have the courage and determination to make repeated assaults it may go hard with the defenders of Ladysmith. But the defenders hitherto have had the counterbalancing advantage of a superior artillery. I think it reasonable to expect that with the better discipline of his force, its greater cohesion and mobility and the high spirit which animates it, Sir George White will be able to defy the Boers for many weeks. But, suppose the unexpected to happen, as it sometimes does in war, and Sir George White's resistance to be overcome? Such a victory would have a tremendous effect upon the hopes and spirits of the Boers. It would almost double the fighting value of their army, and would probably bring to their side many of their colonial kinsmen. Joubert would become more daring, and, if Sir Redvers Buller had divided his force, would attack its nearest portion with a prospect of success. The failure of Sir Redvers Buller would

then not be outside the bounds of possibility. What that would involve there is no need to expound—the Empire would be in peril of its existence. We may feel pretty sure that things will not come to such a pass; that another week will show Sir George White well holding his own and a part of the Army Corps preparing to move. Yet it would be prudent to guard against accidents by sending further troops to the Cape. Ten thousand men ordered now would be at Cape Town by the middle of December; but every delay in ordering them will mean, in case they should in December be wanted, a period of suspense like that through which we are now passing.

The moral of the present situation seems to me to be that we should scrutinise our political personages, noting which of them have betrayed their inability to see what was happening and to look ahead, bringing down their figures in our minds to their natural size, and exalting those who have shown themselves equal to their tasks.

The man in the street might do well to consider whether the great departments of Government, such as the War Office and the Army, should for ever be entrusted to men who have not even a nodding acquaintance with the business which their departments have to transact, the business called War. Success in that as in other business depends on putting knowledge in power.

TWO VIEWS OR TRUE VIEWS?

November 15th, 1899

OCTOBER 11th saw the opening of hostilities, and of the first chapter of the war, the conflict between Sir George White with sixteen thousand men and General Joubert with something like double that number. The first chapter had three sections: First, the unfortunate division of Sir George White's force and the isolation

of and unsuccessful attack upon his right wing; secondly, the reunion of his wings at Ladysmith; thirdly, the concentration of the Boers against the force at Ladysmith and the surrounding or investment of Sir George White. This third section is not yet ended, but the gathering of the forces at Cape Town and at Port Natal points to its conclusion and to the opening of the second chapter. The arrival of the first portion of the transport flotilla is the only important change since last week.

I thought from the beginning that the division of Sir George White's force was strategically unsound, and the position of Ladysmith a bad one because it lent itself to investment. It is now known that the division of forces and the decision to hold Ladysmith, even until it should be turned and surrounded, was due not to strategical but to what are called political considerations. The Government of Natal thought that if the troops were withdrawn from Glencoe—Dundee, or the whole force

collected, say at Colenso instead of Ladysmith, the appearance of retreat would have a bad effect on the natives, the Kaffirs, and perhaps the Dutch farmers. Accordingly, out of deference to the view of the local Government, the General consented to do his work in what he knew to be the wrong way. This is a perfect specimen of the way in which wars are "muddled"—I borrow the expression from Lord Rosebery—and it deserves thinking over.

No popular delusion is more extraordinary and none more widespread than the notion that there are two ways of looking at a war, one the military aspect and the other the governmental or civil aspect, that both are legitimate, and that, as the Government is above the general, in case of a clash the military view must fall into the background. This notion is quite wrong, and the more important the position of the men who have got it into their heads, the more harm it does. There is only one right way of looking at war, and that consists in seeing

it as it is. If two men both take a true view of an operation of war, they will agree, whether they are both soldiers, both civilians, or one a soldier and the other a civilian. It does not matter what you call their view, but, as a soldier who knows his business ought to have true views about it, the proper name for the true view is the military view. If the civil view is a different one it must be wrong. In this case the belief that a retreat from a position to which troops had been sent would have a bad effect was no doubt founded on fact. But for that reason the troops ought not to have been sent there until it was ascertained that the forward move was consistent with the best plan of campaign. Some person other than the general charged with the defence of Natal had been arranging his troops for him without consulting him, and had done it badly. Then came the question of moving them back, and the probable "bad effect" was raised as a scarecrow. But the reply to that was that the bad effect of

retreat is not half so bad as the bad effect of defeat, or of the embarrassments of a position which, being strategically wrong, may involve mishaps.

When a civil government moves troops in connection with war it ought to move them to the right places; that is according to sound strategy or sound military principles. In short, whoever deals in war ought to understand war. The reader may think that a commonplace, but in reality it is like too many commonplaces—a truth that very important people forget at critical moments. The first principle of action in war is to have two men to one at the decisive point. How comes it, then, that for six weeks Sir George White has to defend Natal with one against two? Evidently the first principle has been violated. It came about exactly in the same way as the putting one of Sir George White's brigades at Dundee. The Government managed it; it was a fragment of the civil view of war. How long, then, the reader may ask, should the civil view of war be allowed scope and when should the

military view be called in? Let me be permitted to alter the labels and instead of "military view" to say "view based upon knowledge"; and instead of "civil view" to say, "view not based upon knowledge." I think that all dealings in war should be guided by the view based upon knowledge and that the other view should be for ever left out of account.

My unpopular belief that nobody should meddle with the management of a war unless he understands it is, I admit, most uncomfortable, for as a war is always managed by the Government I am obliged to think that every Government ought to understand war. But in this country the Government is entrusted to a Committee of Peers and Members of Parliament, none of whom is supposed to be able to take a military view of war. If my belief is right, a British Cabinet is very liable to take a civilian view, and the consequences might be awkward. In fact they are awkward, as the South African war up to date abundantly reveals.

The military view of war is that it consists in the employment of force to compel an adversary to do your will. The employment of force is required in the management of a Nation's affairs when the Nation has quite made up its mind to have something done which another Nation or State has made up its mind shall not be done. When there is this point-blank conflict of wills, and neither side can give way, there must be war, and the military view is that when you see war coming you should get your troops into their places, because the first moves are the most important, and a bad first move is very apt to lead to checkmate.

In the case of South Africa the true view was taken at the right time by Sir Alfred Milner. He was instructed that Great Britain would take up the Uitlander's cause, and sent to Bloemfontein to see whether President Kruger was prepared for an equitable settlement. He proposed such a settlement, and, as President Kruger declared the terms impossible, he made it plain that if there

were no settlement on such lines as he had suggested, there must be war. That was the true view, and the moment when the conference was broken off was the moment for Great Britain to get her forces ready with all convenient speed. But Mr. Balfour on the day when he heard the news took a civilian view; instead of looking the war in the face he expressed the hope that President Kruger would change his mind. That hope the Government cherished, as we now know, until the end of the first week of September, when the Boer forces were so far on in their preparations that Natal had been begging for protection. The Government then sent ten thousand men, making the sixteen thousand of Sir George White. Yet the Government at that time had before it the military view that to compel the Boers to accept Great Britain's will seventy thousand men would be required. Evidently, then, the sending of the ten thousand arose not from the military view, but the civil view that war is a disagreeable

business, and that it is to be hoped there will be none of it, or at any rate as little as possible.

The misfortunes in Natal will probably be repaired and the war in time brought to its conclusion—the submission of the Boers to Great Britain's will. But suppose the dispute had been with a great Power, and that in such a case the military view had been shut out from the day the negotiations began until the great Power was ready? The result must have been disaster and defeat on a great scale. Disaster and defeat on a great scale are as certain to come as the sun to rise to-morrow morning unless the Government arranges to take the military view of war into its midst. There will have to be a strategist in the Cabinet if the British Empire is to be maintained. This is another unpopular view and is hateful to all politicians, who declare that it is unconstitutional. But it does not, in fact, involve any constitutional change, far less change than has been made since 1895 at the instance of Mr. Balfour; and it would be better to alter a little

the system of managing the Nation's affairs than to risk the overthrow of the Empire.

BULLER'S PROBLEM

November 22nd, 1899

THE six weeks of anxious waiting are over, and to-day the second chapter of the war begins. On either side of the Boer States a division of Sir Redvers Buller's force is now in touch with the enemy, and at either point there may be a battle any day.

The small British forces sent out or organised on the spot before the declaration of war have kept the enemy's principal forces occupied until now, so that he has been unable to make any decisive use of the margin of superiority which he possessed over and above what was needed to keep the British detachments where they were. The resisting power of these detachments is, however, not inexhaustible; they have kept at bay for a considerable time forces much more

numerous than themselves, and the first move required of the fresh British forces is to take the pressure off them and to combine with them. The centre of gravity is in Natal, for there is the principal Boer army, probably two-thirds of the whole Boer power, and there, too, a whole British division is invested. A palpable success here for either side must go far to decide the issue of the war.

General Joubert's force in Natal is so strong that while keeping his grip upon Ladysmith, where Sir George White has not less than ten thousand men, he has been able to move south with a considerable force, perhaps fifteen thousand men, to oppose Sir C. F. Clery's advance. Sir C. F. Clery has already at least seven, and possibly nine, strong battalions, to which within a day or two three more will be added, and perhaps as many as thirty-six guns, with parties of bluejackets and various Natal levies. His interest is to delay battle until all his force has come up. The advanced troops seem

to be spread along the line from Mooi River to Estcourt, and the Boer forces are facing them on a long line to the east of the railway from a point beyond Estcourt to a point below Mooi River. The Boers are on the flank from which their attack would be most dangerous, and seem to aim at interposing between the parts of Sir C. F. Clery's force, and at a convergent attack in superior strength upon his advance guard at Estcourt.

I should have expected the advance parties of Sir C. F. Clery's force to have fallen back as the Boers approached. The attempt to keep up the connection between the parts of a concentrating force by means of the railway strikes me as very dangerous from the moment that the enemy is in the neighbourhood. The important thing for Sir C. F. Clery is not whether his battle takes place twenty miles nearer to Ladysmith or twenty miles farther away, but that it should be an unmistakable victory, so that after it the Boer force engaged should be unable to offer any

further serious hindrance to his advance. To gain an end of this kind a general should not merely bring up all the troops from the rear, falling back for them if necessary, but should take care that none can be cut off by the enemy in his front. A decisive victory by Sir C. F. Clery or by Sir Redvers Buller, who may feel this action to be so important as to justify his presence, would leave no doubt as to the issue of the war. An indecisive battle would postpone indefinitely the relief of Ladysmith and leave the future of the campaign in suspense. Defeat would be disastrous, for it would probably involve the ultimate loss of Sir George White's force. For these reasons I regard the battle shortly to be fought in Natal as the first decisive action of the war, and am astonished that a larger proportion of Sir Redvers Buller's force has not been sent to take part in it.

The whole business of a commander-in-chief in war is to find out the decisive point and to have the bulk of his forces there in time. If he can

do that on the half-dozen occasions which make the skeleton of a war he has fulfilled his mission. He never need do anything else, for all the rest can be done by his subordinates. Not every commander fulfils this simple task because not every one refuses to let himself be distracted. All sorts of calls are made upon him to which he finds it hard to be deaf; very often he is doubtful whether one or another subordinate is competent, and then he is tempted to do that subordinate's work for him. That is always a mistake because it means neglect of the commander's own work, which is more important.

The task, though it appears simple is by no means easy, as the present war and the present situation show. While the fate of the Empire hangs in the balance between Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg, a good deal depends on the course of events between Kimberley and Queenstown. In the northern part of Cape Colony the Dutch inhabitants are naturally divided in their sympathies, and the loyally

disposed have been sorely tried by the long weeks of waiting for some sign of Great Britain's power. None has yet been forthcoming. They know that Kimberley is besieged and that the British Government has done little for its defence. During the last week or two they have been threatened by the Free State Boers, and have seen Stormberg and other places evacuated by the British. At length the Free State Boers have come among them, marched into their towns, proclaimed the annexation of the country, and commandeered the citizens. If this goes on the Boer armies will soon be swelled to great dimensions by recruits from the British colony, a process which cannot go on much longer without shaking the faith of the whole Dutch population in the supremacy of Great Britain. Some manifestation of British strength, energy, and will is evidently urgently needed in this region. Moreover, Kimberley is hard beset, and its fall would seem to the whole countryside to be the visible sign of a British collapse. No

wonder, then, that Sir Redvers Buller has sent Lord Methuen as soon as he could be ready to the relief of Kimberley. The column consists of the Brigade of Guards, the Ninth Brigade, made up of such battalions as were at hand to replace Hildyard's brigade (sent to Natal), of a naval detachment, a cavalry regiment, and two or three batteries, besides local levies. Kimberley is five or six days' march from Orange River, and at some point on the way the Boers will no doubt try to stop the advance. I feel confident that Lord Methuen, whom I know as an accomplished tactician, will so win his battle as not to need to do the same work twice over.

The advance of Lord Methuen's division renders imperative the protection of the long railway line from Cape Town to Orange River. This seems to be entrusted to General Forestier-Walker's forces, reduced to two battalions, and to General Wauchope's Highland brigade. One battalion only is with General Gatacre at Queenstown, and two battalions of General

Lyttelton's brigade which have reached Cape Town are as yet unaccounted for in the telegrams.

How, then, if all his forces are thus employed could Sir Redvers Buller, by taking thought, have added anything to Sir C. F. Clery's force on the Mooi River? The answer is that a commander's decision must usually be a choice of risks. To have sent on to Natal a part of the troops now in Cape Colony would have been to have increased the danger of the Cape Dutch going over to the Boers. Which was the less of two possible evils—the spread of disaffection in the Cape Colony or the loss of Sir George White's force? No one at home can decide with confidence because the knowledge here available of the situation in either colony is very limited. Subject to this reserve, I should be disposed to think the danger in Natal the more serious, and the chance of losing Colonel Kekewich's force a mere trifle in comparison with the defeat of General Joubert, for the effect

of Joubert's defeat would be felt on the Orange River, whereas the relief of Kimberley can hardly produce an appreciable effect on the situation in Natal.

The difficult problem of which General Buller is now giving his solution has been created for him by the Government, which from June to October was playing with a war which according to its own admissions it did not seriously mean. "Mistakes in the original assembling of armies can hardly be repaired during the whole course of the campaigns, but all arrangements of this sort can be considered long beforehand and—if the troops are ready for war and the transport service is organised—must lead to the result intended." So wrote Moltke in 1874 in one of the most famous passages ever published. If last spring the Government or even the Secretary of State for War alone had been in earnest, had been doing what plain duty required, the nature and conditions of the South African war would have been thought out, and the military judgment

which was to conduct it would have been set to devise the proper opening. That would have consisted in landing simultaneously, thirty thousand men at Durban and forty thousand at the Cape. These forces would not have moved forward until they were complete and ready, and though the Boers might meantime have overrun their borders, the British advance when it came would have been continuous, irresistible, and decisive. Instead of that the Government gave the Boers notice in June that there might be war, so that the Boers had the whole summer to get ready.

When in September the Government began to think of action the only idea was defending Natal. But this defence was not thought of as part of a war. The idea never seems to have occurred to the Government that the need for defence in Natal could not arise except in case of war, and that then to defend Natal would be impracticable except by beating the Boer army. Accordingly, the handful of troops in Natal were posted

without regard to the probable outlines of the war, and therefore, wrongly posted. The consequence was that when war came they could not be concentrated except at the cost of fighting and loss, and of a retreat which gave the enemy the belief that he had won a victory. Even then the point held—Ladysmith—was too far north and liable to be turned. All these mistakes, made before Sir George White arrived, were evident to that general when he first reached Ladysmith, but they could not then be remedied, and he had to do, and has done, the best he could in the circumstances. The fact of Sir George White's investment compels Sir Redvers Buller to begin his campaign with the effort to relieve him, and the fact that Kimberley is held by a weak force compels him to divide his force when his one desire certainly must have been to keep it united. In the expected battle at Mooi River Sir Redvers Buller will be trying to make up for the faulty arrangements of September. The desire to hold as much of the railway as possible—also due to the false position of Sir

George White's force—has, perhaps, led General Hildyard to spread out his force over too long a line. But, in spite of the difficulties created by errors at the start, I am not without hopes that these remarks will soon be put out of date by a decisive British victory.

FIGHTING AGAINST ODDS

November 29th, 1899

Two factors in the present war were impressed upon my mind at the beginning: first, that the British Army was never in better condition as regards the zeal and skill of its officers, the training and discipline of the men, and the organisation of the field services; secondly, that the Government had deliberately handicapped that Army by giving the Boers many weeks' clear start in which to try with their whole forces to overwhelm the small British parties sent out at haphazard to delay them. The whole course

of events up to now has been underlining these two judgments. The British troops gave proof of their qualities at Talana Hill, at Elandslaagte, and on the trying retreat from Dundee. There is no more difficult task in war than a frontal attack upon a position defended by the repeating rifle. Good judges have over and over again pronounced it impossible. But the British troops have done it again and again. General Hildyard's attack on Beacon Hill, an arduous action for a definite purpose which was effected—the re-opening of the railway from Estcourt towards the south—was a creditable achievement on the Natal side. On the Cape side Lord Methuen's advance from Orange River is an example of the greatest determination and energy coupled with caution on the part of the general, and of the most brilliant courage on the part of the troops. I thought it probable that so skilful a tactician as Lord Methuen would combine flank with frontal attacks. It seems that the conditions gave him little or no opportunity to do that, and he has

had three times to assault and drive back a well-posted enemy. At Belmont, on the 23rd, and at Enslin, on the 25th, Lord Methuen had a numerical superiority large enough to justify an attack in which heavy loss was to be expected. The losses were not exceptionally great, and this fact proves that the British troops are of very much higher quality than their adversaries. At Modder River, on the 28th, the numbers were practically equal. The Boers were strongly entrenched and concealed, and could not be outflanked. That they were driven back at all is as proud a record for our troops as any army could desire, for the attacking force ought to have been destroyed. The engagement may well have been "one of the hardest and most trying in the annals of the British Army," and if the victory is a glory to the soldiers, the resolve to attack in such conditions reveals in Lord Methuen the strength of character which is the finest quality of a commander.

If it is well that we at home should appreciate

the splendid results of many years of good teaching given to the officers and men of the Army, results to be attributed in great part, though not exclusively, to the efforts of Lord Wolseley and his school, it is no less our duty to face squarely the fact that the Nation has not done its duty by this Army. The Nation in this sense means the people acting through the Government. To see how the Government has treated the Army we have only to survey the situation in South Africa. Fifty thousand men were ordered out on October 7th,—an Army Corps, a cavalry division and troops for the line of communications. The design was that, with the communications covered by the special troops sent for that duty, the Army Corps and the cavalry division, making together a body of forty thousand men, should cross the Orange River and sweep through the Free State towards Pretoria, while Natal was protected by a special force there posted.

But long before the Army Corps was complete

this plan had been torn to pieces by the Boers. Sir George White's force, being hardly more than a third the strength of the army with which the Boers invaded Natal, could not stop the invasion, though it could hold out when surrounded and invested.

Accordingly the first task of Sir Redvers Buller was to stem the flood of Boer invasion in Natal and to relieve Sir George White. For this purpose he is none too strong with three out of the six infantry brigades that make up the Army Corps. The remaining three brigades could not carry out the original programme of sweeping through the Free State, and meantime the Boers have overrun the great district between Colesberg and Barkly East, between the Orange River and the Stormberg range. General Gatacre with a weak brigade at Queenstown is watching this invasion which as yet he seems hardly strong enough to repel. The rest of the troops are required in the protection of the railways, of the depôt of stores at De Aar, and the bridge at Orange

River. But Kimberley was invested and Mafeking in danger, and the effect of the fall of either of them upon the Cape Dutch might be serious. Something must be done. Accordingly Lord Methuen with two brigades set out towards Kimberley. His task is both difficult and dangerous; he has not merely to break the Boer resistance by sheer hard fighting, but to run the risk that Boer forces from other quarters, perhaps from the army invading Cape Colony, may be brought up in his rear, and that he may in this way be turned, enveloped, and invested. The scattering of forces is due to the initial error of sending too small a force to Natal, and of making no provision for its reinforcement until after a six weeks' interval. The consequence is that instead of our generals being able to attack the Boers with the advantage of superior numbers, with the concomitant power of combining flank and frontal attacks, and with the possibility of thus making their victories decisive by enveloping tactics or by effective

pursuit, the British Army has to make attack after attack against prepared fronts, which though they prove its valour can lead to no decisive results, except at the cost of quite disproportionate losses.

It is possible, and indeed we all hope that the Boer forces, at first under-estimated, may now be over-estimated, and that Sir Redvers Buller, whose advance is probably now beginning, will not have to deal with superior numbers. In that case his blows will shatter the Boer army in Natal, so that by the time he has joined hands with Sir George White the enemy will feel himself overmastered, will lose the initiative, and begin to shrink from the British attacks. That state of things in Natal would lighten Lord Methuen's work. But it would be rash to assume such favourable conditions. We must be prepared for the spectacle of hard and prolonged fighting in Natal, and for the heavy losses that accompany it. The better our troops come out of their trials the more are we bound to ask

ourselves how it came about that they were set to fight under difficulties, usually against superior numbers, though the British force devoted to the war was larger than the whole Boer army? The cause of this is that a small force was sent out on September 8th, and nothing more ordered until October 7th, and the cause of that arrangement was that the Government, as Mr. Balfour has naïvely told us, never believed that there would be a war, or that the Free State would join the Transvaal, until the forces of both States were on the move. Our statesmen negotiated through June, July, and August, talked in July of "putting their hands to the plough," and yet took no step to meet the possibility that the Boers would prove in earnest and attack the British colonies until the Boer riflemen were assembling at Standerton and patrolling into Natal. Does not this argue a defect in the training of our public men, a defect which may be described as ignorance of the nature of war and of the way in which it should be provided for? Mr. Balfour

admits that his eyes have been opened, but does not that imply that they had been shut when they ought to have been open? If the members of the Government failed to take the situation seriously in June, what is to be thought of the members of the Opposition, some of whom even now cannot see that the choice was between abandoning Empire and coercing the Boers? The moral is that we should, if possible, strengthen the Government by sending to Parliament representatives of the younger school, which is National and Imperialist rather than Conservative or Liberal.

THE DELAY OF REINFORCEMENTS

December 7th, 1899

THE conditions in South Africa are still critical; indeed, more so than ever. There are three campaigns in progress, and, though there are good grounds for hoping that in each case the balance will turn in favour of the British, the

hope rests rather upon faith than upon that numerical superiority which it is the first duty of a Government to give to its generals.

Lord Methuen's advance came to a pause after the battle of Modder River, now nine days ago. There appear to have been good reasons for the delay. First of all, it is necessary that when, or soon after, Kimberley is reached the railway to De Aar should be available both for the removal of non-combatants, and for the transport of provisions, ammunition and guns. This involves the repair in some way of the bridge at Modder River. Next, it was proved by that battle, in which the Boer force was large enough to make the victory most difficult, and by the arrival after the battle of fresh Boer forces, that Lord Methuen's force was not strong enough for its work. If a whole day and heavy loss were needed to bring about the retreat of eleven thousand Boers from a prepared position it might be impracticable for Lord Methuen without more force to drive away fifteen or eighteen thousand Boers from a prepared position at Spyt-

fontein, and the possibility of such a body of Boers being at that point had to be reckoned with. Lord Methuen needed more infantry, more artillery, and more cavalry. Of none of the three arms had General Forestier-Walker any abundant supply. If he has sent on, besides a cavalry regiment, the whole of the Highland brigade and three batteries of artillery, Lord Methuen would be none too strong. It is essential that, having started, he should defeat the Boers again and reach Kimberley, for a failure would be a disaster. I have great confidence in Lord Methuen and his troops; what determination and bravery can do they will accomplish, and I feel pretty sure that in a day or two we shall have news of another victory and of the relief of Kimberley. But why has the paramount power in South Africa sent a fine general and splendid troops to face heavy odds and to run the risk of finding themselves over-tasked by superior numbers?

If we put the most liberal construction on

General Walker's account of what he has done to reinforce Lord Methuen there are now fifteen battalions, five batteries, and two cavalry regiments north of De Aar. To protect the great depôt of military stores at De Aar and the railway from that point to the Cape a considerable force is needed, and to stem the tide of Boer invasion and Dutch disaffection, which has spread from the Orange River to Tarkastad and Dordrecht, from Colesberg to Barkly East, a further large force is badly wanted. But in the whole of Cape Colony south of the Orange River there appear to be only nine battalions, perhaps a couple of regiments of cavalry, and on the most favourable assumption five batteries. Of these battalions Sir William Gatacre has half-a-dozen on the lines running north from Algoa Bay and East London, the greater part at Putters Kraal, north of Queenstown. This is a tiny force with which to clear an invaded and disaffected area of twelve thousand square miles. We may be perfectly certain that Sir William Gatacre will do the best that can be

done with his force, and if that should be more than his numbers alone would lead us to expect the reason will be that Lord Methuen's victories will have made the Free State Boers uneasy about their road home. A fresh victory near Kimberley and the effectual relief of that place will lighten Sir William Gatacre's load.

The centre of gravity is in Natal, where the greater part of the Boer army and the greater part of the British force in South Africa are confronting one another. There are three British divisions, strong in infantry but weak in artillery, and there is cavalry enough for a strong division. But one of the divisions has been invested and bombarded with more or less persistence since the beginning of November, and the other two are not yet known to be quite ready to move. Sir George White's force is reported to be on short rations, and some of the messages from correspondents in Ladysmith declared a week ago that it was high time for relief to come. The force can hardly be as yet near the limit of its

resisting powers, but it is evidently nearing the stage when after relief it will need rest and recuperation instead of being ready for a vigorous and prolonged advance. General Buller with two divisions will shortly set out to force the passage of the Tugela and to fight his way round Ladysmith, either on the east or on the west, so as to cut off either the retreat to the Free State or that to the Transvaal of the Boer army. If Sir Redvers Buller can in this way win a victory in which the enemy is not merely pushed back, but controlled in his choice of the direction of his retirement, the issue of the campaign in Natal will be settled, and the British Commander will be able to consider his great purpose—the crushing of the Boer armies. The long wrestle between Sir George White and the Boers has no doubt produced a state of exhaustion on both sides, and by the time the decision comes exhaustion will be turned into collapse. If, as we trust, it should be a Boer collapse, Sir Redvers Buller's best

policy, if practicable, will be to follow up a success with the utmost promptitude and vigour, to push on through the mountains, and open a doorway into the country beyond them. A check to Sir Redvers Buller's advance would be disastrous. He can take no more troops from the Cape. The fifth division can hardly be at his disposal before Christmas, for the first transport did not start till November 24th, and the last has not yet left. But a check means insufficient force, and is as a rule to be made good only by reinforcement. It is clear, then, that Sir Redvers Buller must not be checked; he must cross the Tugela and must win his battle. I think that with his twenty thousand men he may be trusted to do both, even if the Boer force is as large as the highest estimates that have been given.

The four decisions pending—at Kimberley, north of Queenstown, at Ladysmith, and on the Tugela—are here represented as all doubtful. I do not expect any of them to go wrong, but it is wise

before a fight to reckon with possibilities, and where the enemy, stubborn, well-armed, and skilful, has also the advantage of numbers, it would be folly not to consider the possibility that he may hold his ground. There are elements of success on the British side that should not be forgotten. The British soldier to-day, as in the past, proves to be a staunch support to any general. To-day, however, he has leaders who, taking them all round, are probably better qualified than any of their predecessors. The divisional generals are all picked for their known grip of the business of war; among the brigadiers there are such devoted students of their profession as Lyttelton and Hildyard, and the younger officers of to-day are more zealous in their business and better instructed than at any previous period. There should be less in this war than in any that the British Army has waged of that incompetence of the subordinates which in past campaigns has often caused the commanders more anxiety than all the enemy's doings.

Yet at every point the Boers appear to outnumber our troops. The question arises how this came about; either the Government has not sent troops enough, or the force given to the Commander-in-Chief has been wrongly distributed. Sir Redvers Buller has done the best he could in difficult conditions. Ladysmith had to be relieved, and he has taken more than half of his force for the purpose. He might have wished to take a third division, but if he had done so Kimberley might have fallen, and the rising at the Cape have spread so fast and so far that the defeat of Joubert would not have restored the balance. Accordingly the smaller half of the force was left in the Cape Colony. Here also there were two tasks. To push back the invasion was a slow business, and if meantime Kimberley had fallen, the insurrection would have become general. Accordingly a minimum force was set to stem the invasion and a maximum force devoted to the relief of Kimberley. The difficulties, therefore, arose not

merely from the strategy in South Africa but from the delay of the Government to send enough troops in time. The fact that Sir George White with a small force was left for two months unsupported produced the rising at the Cape, and compelled the division of the British Army Corps, in consequence of which the whole force is reduced to a perilous numerical weakness at each of four points. But the Army Corps, the cavalry division, and the force for the line of communications, have now to wait three weeks before they can be strengthened. It was known to the Government before the end of October that Ladysmith would be invested and need relief, that the Cape Dutch would rise, and that unless Kimberley were helped the rising would become dangerous. Yet the despatch of the first transport of the fifth division was delayed until November 24th. Has the Government even now begun to take the war seriously? Do the members of the Cabinet at this eleventh hour understand that failure to crash the Boers means

breakdown for the Empire, and that a prolonged struggle with them carries with it grave danger of the intervention of other Powers? Does Lord Lansdowne continue to direct the movement of reinforcements according to his own unmilitary judgment modified by that of one or more of his unmilitary colleagues? I decline to believe that Lord Wolseley has arranged or accepted without protest this new system of sending out the Army in fragments, each of which may be invested or used up before the next can arrive.

THE NATION'S PROBLEM

December 14th, 1899

THE failure of Lord Methuen's attack at Magersfontein has brought home to every mind the extreme gravity of the situation in South Africa, and it seems most likely that in the western theatre of war the crisis has issued

in a decision unfavourable to the British cause.

It is well to keep the whole before our eyes even when examining a part, so I begin with a bird's-eye view. In Natal Sir Redvers Buller seems to be ready, and to be about to strike, for the advance of Barton's brigade towards Colenso must be the prelude to the advance of the main body to the right or the left to cross the Tugela above or below the broken railway bridge. If Sir Redvers Buller is so fortunate as to bring the principal Boer army to an action and to defeat it so thoroughly as seriously to impair its fighting power, the balance in the eastern theatre of war will have turned, and attention may be concentrated upon the restoration of the position in the west. There the balance has turned the wrong way. General Gatacre's defeat at Stormberg would not be a very serious matter, for his force was small, were it not that it damages the credit of British generalship, and that it must have given a great stimulus not only to the Free State

army but to the rebellion of the Cape Boers. For the Boers Stormberg is a great victory, which will encourage them to fresh enterprises in a country where at least every second Dutch farmer is their friend and ally. They may, therefore, be expected to turn their attention as soon as they can to Lord Methuen's communications. This probability rendered Lord Methuen's position at Modder River doubly critical. On Sunday he was ready, and set out to test his fate. On Tuesday he was back again in his camp, the measure of his defeat being given by his assurance that in his camp he was in perfect security. Those are ominous words, for they have not the air of the man who does not know that he is beaten, and who means to try again at once. It is, however, conceivable that, as the defeat seems to have been caused by an inexplicable blunder, the marching of a brigade in the dark in dense formation close up to the muzzles of the enemy's rifles, the effort may be made to attack again with better dispositions. A second attack would, of

course, be attended with twofold risks, but if it has no chance of success the defeat already suffered must be reckoned a disaster. If Lord Methuen is definitely beaten, Kimberley must be set down as lost, and the question is of the safety of Lord Methuen's division. In that case to remain at Modder River is to court investment, which would last for many weeks. The risk would not be justified unless there is in the camp an ample store of supplies and ammunition, and even then it is not clear what purpose it would serve. If, therefore, the defeat is decisive the proper course is a retreat to a position of which the communications can be protected, and which cannot easily be turned. The whole situation, then, is failure in the Cape Colony on both lines, coupled with an impending action in Natal, of which, until it is over, a favourable result, though there is reason to hope for it, had better not be too lightly assumed. Yet the British purpose of the war is to establish the British power in South Africa on a firm basis: the only

way to prepare that basis being to crush the military power of the two Republics. The British forces now in South Africa are clearly not strong enough to do their work. What is the Nation to do in order to accomplish the task which it has undertaken?

A nation can act only through its Government, and, as at this moment the British Nation is united in the resolve to fight this war out, the Government has, without looking back, to give a lead. The first thing is for the Cabinet to convince the public that it is doing all that can be done, and doing it in the right way. But the public does not trust its own judgment. That much-talked-of person the man in the street does not fancy himself a general, and is not over-fond of the military critic—the unfortunate man whose duties have compelled him to try to qualify himself to form a judgment about war. There is a sound instinct that war is a special business, and that it should be managed according to the judgment of those who are

masters of the trade; not those who can write about it, but those who have practised it and proved their capacity. But those men, the generals who are believed to have a grasp of the way to carry a war through, are all outside the Cabinet. The Cabinet has its chosen expert adviser, the Commander-in-Chief; but rumour or surmise hints that his advice has been by no means uniformly followed. Surely the wisest course which the Cabinet could now adopt would be to call Lord Wolseley to their board as an announcement and a guarantee that in the prosecution of the war his judgment was given its true place, and that nothing thought by him necessary or desirable was being left undone. If the military judgment holds that more force is required the extra force must be provided. There are, after the Regular Army and the Marines, the whole of the Militia, the Volunteers, and thousands of trained men in the British colonies. There is no difficulty, seeing that the Nation is determined to keep on its course, about

drawing upon these forces to any extent that may be required. If there are constitutional forms to be fulfilled they can be fulfilled; if Parliamentary sanction is needed it can be had for the asking.

At the present rate of consumption the fifth division will hardly have been landed before its energies will be absorbed, and unless Sir Redvers Buller is peculiarly fortunate during the next few days, the fifth and sixth divisions together will not be enough to change the present adverse situation into one of decided British preponderance. There should be at the Cape a reservoir of forces upon which the British Commander should be able to draw until he can drive the enemy before him. When that stage comes the flow of reinforcements might be suspended, but to stay or delay it before that stage has been reached is to court misfortune.

Something might probably be done to block the channel through which the enemy derives some of his resources and some of his information. The telegraph cable at Delagoa Bay might

with advantage have its shore end lifted into a British man-of-war. There must be ways and means of stopping all intercourse through Portuguese territory between the Transvaal and the sea. That this is desirable is manifest, and to such cases may be applied the maxim, "Where there is a will there is a way."

The idea seems to be spreading that this war must lead to a thorough overhauling and recasting of the British military organisation. But if you are to make a bigger army, an army better suited to the times and to the needs of the Nation, you must begin by getting a competent army-creating instrument. You cannot expect a Cabinet of twelve or eighteen men ignorant of war to create a good war-fighting machine. You cannot entrust the organisation of your Army to any authority but the Government, for the body that creates your Army will govern you. The only plan that will produce the result required is to give authority over the making and using of the Army to a man or men who under-

stand War—War as it is to-day. In short, a Nation that is liable to War requires men of War in its Government, and, in the case of Great Britain, the place for them is in the Cabinet. The traditional practice of having a civilian Minister inside the Cabinet with all the authority, and a soldier with all the knowledge outside the Cabinet, was devised for electioneering purposes, and not for war. The plan has answered its object very well for many years, having secured Cabinets against any intrusion of military wisdom upon their domestic party felicity. But now that the times have changed, and that the chief business of a Cabinet is to manage a war, it seems unwise to keep the military judgment locked out. Party felicity was valuable some years ago when there was a demand for it; but the fashions have changed. To-day the article in demand is not eloquence nor the infallibility of "our side," whichever that may be; the article in demand to-day is the organisation of victory. That is

not to be had at all the shops. Those who can supply it are very special men, who must be found and their price paid. The Nation has given bail for the production of this particular article, and if it is not forthcoming in time the forfeit must be paid. The bail is the British Empire.

MORE AWAKENING

December 21st, 1899

A week ago, while we were thinking over failure in the Cape Colony on both lines of advance, we could still hope for success on what circumstances had made the most important line, in Natal. But now there has been failure in Natal also.

Of the battle of Colenso Sir Redvers Buller's telegraphic despatch, though it probably does the commander less justice than he would have received at the hands of any other narrator, gives an authoritative if meagre account. The attack

seems to have been planned rather as a reconnaissance in force, to be followed up in case it should reveal possibilities of victory, than as a determined effort on which everything was to be staked. In all probability this form of action was inevitable in the conditions. The Boers held a strong position, covered in front by a river fordable at only two points. Such a position can hardly be reconnoitred except by attack. It could not be turned except by a long flank march, which, if successful would have occupied several days, during which the camp and railhead would have to be strongly guarded. There is reason to believe that the force in Natal has not the transport necessary to enable it to leave the railway for several days, during which it would be a flying column. Moreover, the Boers, being all mounted, could always place themselves across the path of any advance. Accordingly it is at least premature to assume that any course other than that which he adopted was open to Sir Redvers Buller. The mishap to a portion of the

artillery will be better understood when the full story of the battle is accessible. Meanwhile Sir Redvers Buller's withdrawal of the troops when he saw that success was unattainable has preserved his force, and he is now awaiting reinforcement before again attempting an advance. The critical element in the position of affairs in Natal lies in the fact that time runs against the British. Sir Redvers Buller and the Government no doubt know pretty accurately the date up to which Sir George White can hold Ladysmith. If by that date he has neither been relieved nor succeeded in fighting his way to the Tugela his situation will be desperate.

Lord Methuen has probably been as much hampered as Sir Redvers Buller by want of transport. He, too, will not forget the importance of preserving his force and his liberty of action, and will retire rather than await investment.

Through the mists which always shroud a war during its progress the fact is beginning to be visible that the British generals have been from

the beginning paralysed not, as anxious observers are always prone to conclude, by any want of knowledge or energy, but by the nature of the implement in their hands. They have to fight an enemy of unprecedented mobility. The Boers are all horsemen and can ride from point to point more than twice as fast as the British infantry can march; they live in British territory by requisitions or loot, and therefore can limit their transport train. But the British forces are restricted to a little more than two miles an hour and to twelve or fifteen miles a day according to the ground. There is everywhere a deficiency if not a complete lack of transport, said to be due to the action of the Treasury during the summer, and therefore every column is dependent for its food and ammunition upon a line of railway, which a handful of Boers may at any moment and at any point in its hundreds of miles temporarily interrupt. These considerations should be kept in view not merely in reviewing the conduct of the campaign and the work of the British generals,

but above all in the preparations now being pushed forward throughout the Empire. The project of a Corps of Imperial Yeomanry is a step in the right direction. If it is to contribute to success due importance must be given in the selection of the men to straight shooting, without which good riding can be of little use. Equally important, too, is the selection of leaders. The home-trained officer, however good, must not be exclusively relied upon. Every local war we have had, beginning with the campaigns against the French in America which led to the Seven Years' War, has proved the necessity of giving full scope to local experience and local instincts. Old and new instances abound of the way in which the neglect of the feelings of colonists and of their special qualifications for special work rankles in breasts of a colonial population. If, then, the new Yeomanry are to be of real service in South Africa and to deserve the name Imperial a proportion of their officers of all grades should be men of colonial birth and colonial experience.

The South African troops now at the front have done fine service, and some of their officers might be promoted and transferred to the new Yeomanry, their places being filled by promotions in the corps which they leave. The preparation of transport ought not to lag behind the despatch of reinforcements. At the earliest possible moment the attempt should be made to send into the enemy's territory a great raid of horsemen, on the model of the raids of the American Civil War. A body of several thousand mounted men should march right through a part of the Free State, living upon the country, consuming every scrap of food, and clearing out every farm of all its provisions. If that operation can be repeated two or three times a belt of country will be left across which the Boers without transport will not be able to move, while the British, properly equipped, will not be delayed by its exhaustion.

The plan adopted by the authorities for raising a volunteer contingent is more significant for the future of the National defences than has yet been

realised. Each volunteer battalion is to supply a company to its line battalion in the field and to keep a second company ready at home in reserve. Thus the volunteer force is to be used by being absorbed into the Army. That leads inevitably to the amalgamation of the volunteers with the regular Army, and is a death-blow to the specific character of each of them. It means that henceforth the British Army, like other armies, will be homogeneous, containing no other categories than men with the colours and men in reserves, classified according to the immediacy of their liability to be called up. The volunteer commanding officer disappears, and with him the volunteer officer as such. For now that it is known that the Government will employ non-professional officers only as company officers under professional field officers, no one will take a volunteer commission with the idea of serving for many years from subaltern to commanding officer. What has hitherto been the volunteer force will therefore become a force administered

by professional paid officers. It will cost more, and it will become a branch of the Army. In short, the Government has unwittingly taken a step of which the inevitable consequence is conscription.

But from this follows another change, equally unsuspected by the Ministry. The day that the Nation discovers, as it is now beginning to discover, that war makes its claims on every man and on every household, there will be no more toleration of the unskilled management that is inseparable from the practice of choosing a Secretary of State for War for his ignorance of the subject. The British Nation is at length opening its eyes to the truth that war is a serious matter, and that the neglect of it in peace is costly in blood and perilous to the body politic. When its eyes are wide open it will insist on putting knowledge in power over the Army and the Navy. Thus is coming about, to the infinite benefit of the community, the overthrow of that noxious sham, the party politician.

Late in the day, when the position has become what it is, the Government has thought of the elementary principle that if you want to carry on a war you should begin by finding a commander in whom you have confidence. Accordingly at the eleventh hour Ministers have remembered that the Nation trusts Lord Roberts. This is proof positive that the Government was not in earnest before the late reverses, for had they been serious they would have appointed Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener at the outset. The precedent is useful by what it suggests; for, if during a war you can strengthen the military direction by giving the authority to the man recognised as the most competent, you may also strengthen the political direction by a similar procedure. The Cabinet has thus, perhaps without suspicion of what it was doing, set before the Nation the true problem: "Wanted, a Ministry competent in the management of war."

THE NATION'S BUSINESS

December 28th, 1899

WAR is the Nation's business and, when it comes, the most important part of the Nation's business. A Nation that for many years neglects this branch of its affairs is liable to suffer to any extent. The proverb, "a stitch in time saves nine," gives a very fair idea of the proportion between the amount of effort required in a properly-prepared and well-conducted war, and the amount required when there has been previous neglect.

There must be some way in which a national affair of such importance can be properly managed, and just now it might be well to consider how a nation can manage a war. Certainly not by the methods of political decision to which recent developments of democracy have accustomed us. You cannot fight a campaign by consulting the constituencies or even the House of Commons before deciding whether a general shall move to his right or his left, shall advance

or retire, shall seek or shall avoid a battle. Neither can you settle by popular vote whether you will make guns of wire or of fluid compressed steel, what formations your infantry shall adopt, whether the soldier is to give six hours a week to shooting and one to drill, or six to drill and one to shooting.

Yet all these questions and many others must be settled, some during peace and some during war, and they must be settled correctly or else there will be defeat. In political matters the accepted test of what is correct is the opinion of the majority as expressed by votes in a general election, but in war the test of what is correct is the result produced upon the enemy. If his guns out-range yours, if his troops at the point of collision defeat yours, there has been some error in the preparation or in the direction, unless indeed the enemy is a State so much stronger than your own that it was folly to go to war at all, and in that case there must have been an error of policy. The decisions upon which

successful war depends turn upon matters which have no relation to the wishes or feelings of the majority; matters not of opinion but of fact; matters about which eloquence is no guide, and in regard to which the truth cannot be ascertained from the ballot box, but only by the hard labour of prolonged study after previous training. For success in war depends upon the troops being armed with the best weapons of the day, upon their being trained to use them in the most appropriate manner, upon the amount of knowledge and practice possessed by the generals; upon a correct estimate of the enemy's forces, of their armament and tactics, and upon a true insight into the policy of the Powers with which quarrels are possible.

A year ago it was known to many persons in this country, and the Government was informed by those whose special duty it was to give the information, that the Boer States aimed at supremacy in South Africa, that they were heavily armed, that a large force would be

required to defeat them, and that to postpone the quarrel would make the inevitable war still more difficult. It was well understood also that the difficulty lay in the probability that if a small force were sent it would be exposed to defeat, while if a large one were sent its despatch would precipitate the war. These were the facts known more than a year ago to those who wanted to know. Is it not clear that the Government's management has been based upon something other than the facts; that the Government was all the time basing its action not upon the facts but upon speculations as to what might come out of future ballot-boxes? They were attending to their own mission, that of keeping in office, but neglecting the Nation's necessary business, that of dealing promptly with the Boer assault upon British supremacy in South Africa. The explanation is simple. Every man in the Cabinet has devoted his life since he has been grown up to the art of getting votes for his party, either at the polls or in Parliament. Not one of them has given

his twenty years to studying the art of managing a war.

But a war cannot possibly be well managed by anyone who is not a master of the art. Now and then there has been success by an amateur—a person who, without being a soldier by profession, has made himself one; such a person, for example, as Cromwell. Apart from rare instances of that sort, the only plan for a Government which does not include among its members a soldier, professional or amateur, is to choose a soldier of one class or the other and to delegate authority to him. But this plan does not always succeed, because sometimes a Government composed of men who know nothing of war postpones calling in the competent man until too late. There have been in our time two instances of this plan, one successful and the other a failure. In 1882 Mr. Gladstone's Cabinet drifted against its will and to its painful surprise into the Egyptian war. The Cabinet when it saw that war had come gave Lord Wolseley

a free hand and he was able to save them by the victory of Tel-el-Kebir. A year or two later, being anxious to avoid a Soudan war, they drifted slowly into it; but this time they were too late in giving Lord Wolseley full powers, and he was unable to save Gordon and Khartoum solely because he had not been called upon in time. The best analogy to the course then pursued is that of a sick person whose friends attempt to prescribe for him themselves until the disease takes a palpably virulent form, when they send for a doctor just in time to learn that the patient's life could have been saved by proper treatment a week earlier, but that now there is no hope. For war requires competent management in advance. There are many things which must be done, if they are to be done in time, before the beginning of hostilities, and the more distant the theatre of war the more necessary it may be to take measures beforehand.

The management of a war can never be taken out of the hands of the Government,

because the body which decides when to make preparations is, by the fact that it has the power of making that decision, the supreme authority. If, therefore, a Nation wishes to have reasonable assurance against defeat it must take means to provide the supreme authority with a military judgment. The British system for a long time professed to do this by giving the Secretary of State for War a military adviser who was Commander-in-Chief. Such a plan might have worked on condition that the Secretary of State kept the Commander-in-Chief fully informed of the state of negotiations with other Powers, and invariably followed his advice in all matters relating to possible wars. The condition has never been fulfilled, and for many years, as there were no serious wars, the mischief of the neglect was not apparent except to the few who understood war, and who have for many years been anxious. But in 1895 the present Cabinet began its career under the inspiration of Mr. Balfour, who knows nothing

of war, by giving the Secretary of State absolute authority over the Army and all preparations for war so far as the Army is concerned, and by formally declaring that the Secretary of State could please himself whether he followed the advice of the Commander-in-Chief. Thus the Nation in its indifference allowed the fate of its next war to be entrusted to hands not qualified to direct a war, and allowed itself to be deprived of the means of knowing whose advice was being followed in regard to the preparation of its defences. At the same time a Committee of Defence was formed of members of the Cabinet, a committee of untrained men, to settle the broad lines of the Nation's preparations for the maintenance of the Empire. The results of these remarkable arrangements are now manifest, and yet the cry is that there is to be no change in the Government.

But unless there is a thorough change as soon as possible, unless steps are taken to find

a man competent in the management of war and to give him a place in the Cabinet, where he can keep the naval and military preparations abreast of the policy, or check a policy for the execution of which adequate preparation cannot be made, what guarantee can the Nation have that it will not shortly have a second war on its hands, or that the war now begun will be brought to a successful end?

But if war as a branch of the Nation's affairs ought to be entrusted to a man competent in that branch, what about the tradition that any politician of eminence in the party is fit to be the Cabinet Minister at the head of any branch of the public service? Is it not the truth that this tradition is bad and should be got rid of, and that every branch of the Nation's business has suffered from the practice of giving authority for its direction to a minister who has not been trained to understand it? The war will have been a great benefit if it leads to the universal recognition of the plain fact that Jack of all

trades is master of none, and that no branch of the public service can possibly be well directed unless its director is thoroughly conversant with the business with which he is entrusted. So soon as the Nation grasps the idea that democracy can fulfil its mission only when the electors are resolved to choose leaders by their qualification for the work they have to do, the British Nation will resume the lead among the nations of the world.

WANTED, THE MAN

January 5th, 1900

THERE has been no substantial, visible change in the military situation since the battle of Colenso on December 15th. The actions of General French at Colesberg and of Colonel Pilcher at Sunnyside are valuable mainly as evidence that with sound tactics the Boers are by no means invincible, and that British troops only require

intelligent leading to be as capable of the best work as any troops in the world. General French, however, until the hour at which I write had not finished his wrestle with the Boers at Colesberg, and until it is over no military action can be classed either as success or failure. Colonel Pilcher's opponents were colonial rebels, probably not as good as Transvaal Boers, who have had in peace more rifle practice. The losses were small, proving that the resistance of the enemy was by no means desperate, and as the retreating force was not pursued the defeat was not crushing. Colonel Pilcher by the temporary occupation of Douglas reaped the fruits of his victory, but the whole small campaign is of no very great importance, as the possession of the triangle between the railway and the Riet and Orange Rivers depends in the ultimate issue not upon the event of local skirmishes, but on the issue of the decisive fighting between the British Army and the forces of the Republics. Lord Methuen's communications appear to be now well

organized and guarded, so that his position need cause no special anxiety. A good deal depends on the outcome of the struggle between General French and the Colesberg Boers, for, while a Boer defeat would render the line from the Cape to Orange River quite safe, a Boer victory would endanger not only Naauwpoort but De Aar. General Gatacre's cue should be to risk nothing. If he waits where he is and merely holds his own until the sixth division is ready for use no harm will have been done; if he makes any mistakes the consequences may be more than the sixth division can remedy. The centre of interest still lies between Ladysmith and Frere. The tone of the telegrams from Ladysmith, which declare that though the bombardment has been more effective since Christmas, and through dysentry and enteric fever are busy, "all is yet well," proves that the situation of Sir George White's force is critical, and may at any moment become desperate. The Boers by occupying and forti-

fying positions south of the Tugela have taken the best means of making sure that Sir Redvers Buller's advance, even if successful, shall be delayed and the time taken over it prolonged. The Boer commander sees clearly that his present object is to delay Sir Redvers Buller, so as to gain the time needed to bring about the fall of Ladysmith. If that can be secured the next question will be how to damage Sir Redvers Buller. Of the prospects of Sir Redvers Buller's attack no estimate can be made. He is stronger than he was by the greater part of Sir Charles Warren's division, and it is to be hoped, by plenty of heavy artillery and by an organised transport; but the Boers are stronger than they were by a new position, by three weeks of fortification, and by the consciousness of their last victory. Upon Sir Redvers Buller's fate depends more than anyone cares to say. If he wins and relieves Ladysmith the success of Great Britain in the war will be assured, though the operations may be prolonged for months; but if he should again

fail there is no prospect of success except by exertions of which the Government as yet has not shown the faintest conception. His action can hardly be completed in a single battle or in a day; the first telegrams, therefore, need not necessarily be taken as giving the result; more probably his operations, except in the most unfavourable case, will be continuous for something like a week.

For the Nation there is a question even more vital than the fate of Sir Redvers Buller, and more practical. Nothing that we at home can do can affect the impending battle by the Tugela. The issue of that battle, as of the war, though it is not yet known and can be revealed only by the event, is in reality already settled, for it depends on the proportion of the forces of the two sides, which has been determined by British strategy and cannot now be modified, upon the qualities, armament, and training of the troops, which are the results of the conditions of their enlistment, organisation, and education, and upon the

judgment and will of Sir Redvers Buller, also the outcome of his training and of the Army system. But whatever happens on the Tugela the British Nation has its to-morrow, a very black one in case of a defeat, and a very difficult one even in case of victory, for all the great Powers are for ever competitors for the possession and government of the world, and Great Britain having shown a weakness, expected by others though unexpected by her own people, will in future be hard beset. The Russians have just moved a division from the Caucasus towards the Afghan frontier, which portends trouble for India. The Austrians, as well as the Germans are setting out to build an extra fleet—what for? Because the Austrian Government, like the German and Italian Governments, know, what our recent Governments have never known, that Great Britain has for two or three centuries been the balance weight or fly-wheel of the European machine, by reason of the prescience with which her Navy was handled. Those Governments now

see that statesmanship has gone from us; they divine that the great Navy we now possess cannot be used by a timid and ignorant Government, and that no reliance can be placed upon Great Britain to play her own true game. Accordingly, they see that they must strengthen their own navies with a view to the possible collapse of the British Power. In the near future the maintenance of the British Empire depends upon the Nation's having a Government at once far-seeing and resolute, capable of great resolves and prompt action. Of such a Government there is, however, no immediate prospect. The present Cabinet has given its testimonials: a challenge sent to the Boers by a Government that did not know it was challenging anyone, that did not know the adversary's strength, nor his determination to fight; and a war begun in military ignorance displayed by the Cabinet, and carried on by half measures until the popular determination compelled three-quarter measures. Does anyone suppose that this Cabinet, that did not know its mind till the Boers declared

war, knows or will know its mind about the conflict with Russia in Asia, or about any other of the troubles, foreseen and unforeseen, which await us? A victory in Natal would save the Cabinet and drown the voices of its critics; and in that case the present leaders will infallibly go halting and irresolute into the greater contests that are coming. A defeat in Natal would destroy the Government at once if there were before the public a single man in whose judgment and character there was confidence; but there is no such man, and, as the Opposition leaders are discredited by their conduct in regard to the quarrel with the Boers, the present set will remain at their posts to continue the traditional policy of waiting to be driven by public opinion. The Nation, therefore, has before it a necessary task as urgent as that of reinforcing the Army in the field, which is to find the man in whose judgment as to war and policy as well as in whose character it can place confidence.

The man to be trusted is, unfortunately, not

Lord Wolseley. I have for years fought his battle by urging that the Government ought to follow the advice of its military adviser, a theory of which the corollary is that the adviser must resign the moment he is overruled. I have never meant that the adviser is to be a dictator, nor that the Cabinet should follow advice of the soundness of which it is not convinced. The Cabinet has the responsibility and ought never to act without full conviction. The expert who cannot convince a majority of intelligent non-experts that a necessary measure is necessary is not as expert as he should be; and if he still retains his post after he has been overruled on a measure which he regards as necessary he has not the strength of character which is indispensable for great responsibility. Now, though the relation between a Cabinet and its advisers ought to be secret, in the present case each side has let the cat out of the bag. Lord Wolseley's friends defend him by declaring that he has been overruled. But that defence kills him. If he has been overruled on a trifle it does

not matter, and the defence is a quibble; if he has been overruled on an essential point why is he still Commander-in-Chief? No answer can be devised that is not fatal to his case. Lord Lansdowne's friend, for such Lord Ernest Hamilton may be presumed to be, says: "Supposing, for the sake of argument, that the shortcomings of the War Office in and before the present war were due not to neglect of military counsels, but to the adoption of such counsels, contrary to the more far-seeing judgment of the civil side." That is a condemnation of the civilian Minister and of the Cabinet, for no man in charge of the Nation's affairs ought to take the responsibility for a decision of the soundness of which he is not convinced. If Lord Lansdowne disagreed with Lord Wolseley and was not prepared to ask for that officer's retirement, why did he not himself retire rather than make himself responsible for measures which he thought wrong or mistaken? These are not personal criticisms or attacks. Lord Wolseley and Lord Lansdowne

have both of them in the past rendered splendid services to the Nation. But the Empire is at stake, and a writer's duty is to set forth and apply the principles which he believes to be sound, without being a respecter of persons yet with that respect for every man, especially for every public man, which is the best tradition of our National life. What at the present moment ought not to be tolerated is what Lord Ernest Hamilton suggests, an attack upon the [illegible] at the front, to save the War Office or the Cabinet; and what is needed is that the Ministers should choose a war adviser who can convince them, even though to find him they have to pass over a hundred generals and select a colonel, a captain, or a crammer.

THE STRATEGY OF THE WAR

January 11th, 1900

THE arrival of Lord Roberts at Cape Town announces the approaching beginning of a new chapter in the war, though the second chapter is not yet quite finished.

The first chapter was the campaign of Sir George White with sixteen thousand men against the principal Boer army. It ended with Sir George White's being surrounded in Ladysmith and there locked up.

The second chapter began with the arrival of Sir Redvers Buller at Cape Town. It may be reviewed under two headings: the conception and the execution of the operations. When Sir Redvers Buller reached the Cape, the force which he was expecting, and of which he had the control, consisted altogether of nearly sixty thousand regular troops, besides Cape and colonial troops. There was an Army Corps, thirty-five thousand, a cavalry division, five thousand, troops for the defence of communica-

tions, ten thousand, and troops at the Cape amounting to eight thousand, some of whom were at Mafeking and Kimberley. After deducting fourteen thousand men for communications and garrisons at the Cape, the commander had at his disposal for use in the field about forty-four thousand regular troops arranged as a cavalry brigade, seven brigades of infantry, and corps troops.

There were many tasks before the British general. Southern Natal was being invaded and had to be cleared of the enemy; the Cape Colony, too, had to be freed from its Boer visitors, and the rising of the Cape Dutch stopped. Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking were all awaiting relief, and last, but not least, the Boer armies had to be beaten, and the two Republics conquered. The strategical problem was how to accomplish all these tasks at once, if possible, and if that could not be done, to sort them in order of importance and deal with them in that order. The essential thing was not to

violate any of those great principles which the experience of a hundred wars and the practice of a dozen great generals have proved to be fundamental. The leading principle is that which enjoins concentration of effort in time, space, and object. Do one thing at a time and do it with all your might. If the list of tasks be examined it will be seen that there is a connection between them all, and that the connecting link is the Boer army. Suppose the Boer army to be removed from the scene every one of the other aims would be easy of accomplishment. There would then be no invaders in either colony; Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking would be safe, and the troops in those places free to march where they pleased; the Cape rising could be suppressed at leisure, and the British general could at his convenience go to Pretoria and set up a fresh government. No other of the tasks had this same quality of dominating the situation; any one of them might be accomplished without great or immediate effect upon those that would remain. For this

reason wisdom prescribed as the simplest way of accomplishing the seven or eight tasks the accomplishment of the first or last, the destruction of the Boer army. That army was in three parts: there was a fraction on the western border of the Free State, a fraction south of the Orange River, and the great bulk of the whole force was in northern Natal. Destroy the principal mass, and you could then at your leisure deal with the two smaller pieces. Everything pointed to an attempt to crush the Boer army then in Natal.

There were two ways of getting at that army which was holding Ladysmith in its grip. One was along the railway from Durban, one hundred and eighty-nine miles long; it was sure to bring the British Army face to face with the Boers at the Tugela. That point reached, either the Boers would stand to fight and, therefore, give the opportunity of crushing them, or they would retreat, in which case Ladysmith would be relieved, and the British force, strengthened by

White's division, would be within three hundred miles of Pretoria. A great victory in Natal would save Natal, stop the Cape rising, and, if followed up, draw the Boer forces away from Kimberley and the Cape Colony.

The other way was to follow the railway line or lines from the Cape ports, to collect the Army on the Orange River and advance to Bloemfontein, and thence towards Pretoria or towards the western exits from the passes through the Drakensberg mountains. This plan, however, gave no immediate certainty of an opportunity to attack the Boer army. The British force could be assembled on the Orange River no sooner than on the south bank of the Tugela. But from the Orange River to Bloemfontein there would be a march of one hundred and twenty miles, and the Boer army was not at Bloemfontein. There was a probability that when the British force reached Bloemfontein the Boer army might leave Natal, but the probability did not amount to certainty; it rested upon a guess or

hypothesis of what the Boer general or the Free State Government and its troops would think. Supposing, however, that these persons did not think as was expected; that they determined to complete the conquest of Natal (except Durban, which was protected by the fleet), and to keep their grip upon Ladysmith, at any rate until the British force was nearing the passes of the Drakensberg or crossing the Vaal, and then, but not till then, to retreat to Middleburg? In that case the purpose of the advance, the crushing of the Boer army, might be deferred for a very long time, and meanwhile every one of the minor tasks, except the relief of Kimberley and the repulse of the Free State invaders of the Cape, would be left over. Ladysmith might fall, and its fall stimulate the Cape rising and endanger the communications of the British force advancing north of the Orange River.

These were the two plans, and I confess that my own judgment at the beginning of November inclined to the former, though, as I am aware

that most of those whose strategical judgment I respect hold a decided opinion the other way, I cannot be dogmatic. The prevalent opinion attaches more importance than I can persuade myself to do to the difficulties of the hilly and mountainous country of northern Natal. There is, moreover, a reserve imposed upon observers at home by our ignorance of the state of the transport services of the British forces. No concentration of troops is profitable if the troops when collected cannot be fed.

Subject to these reserves it may be said that Sir Redvers Buller at the beginning of November had to choose between two lines of operations, that by Natal and that by the Cape. The cardinal principle is that you must never divide your force between two lines of operations unless it is large enough to give you on each of the two lines an assured superiority to the enemy's whole force. Sir Redvers Buller's design, however, violated this principle. He neither determined upon action with all his might through the

Cape Colony nor upon action with all his might through Natal, but divided his effort, directing four of his seven brigades to Natal and the other three towards the Orange River; half his cavalry brigade going to Colesberg, and a mixed force of the communication troops to Sterkstroom on the East London line.

This design gave no promise of effecting the dominant task, the crushing of the Boer army, though it aimed at grappling in detail with several of the subordinate tasks; but its execution proved as indecisive as its conception. In Natal the main force under Sir Redvers Buller himself completely failed in the attack on the Boer army at Colenso on December 15th; Lord Methuen's advance for the relief of Kimberley came to a standstill at the Modder River, and met with a serious repulse at Magersfontein; while the smaller parties of Gatacre and French have made little headway against the Free State troops and the rebellious Cape farmers.

The fifth division, the bulk of which was

directed to Natal, has been added to Sir Redvers Buller's force, without having enabled him as yet to strike the decisive blow or even to prevent a determined assault upon Ladysmith by the Boer army. That assault is believed to be now impending, and its delivery will close the second chapter of the war. If Sir Redvers Buller can win his battle in Natal while Sir George White is still unconquered, the military power of the Boers will receive a great shock, and the issue of the war will no longer be doubtful, though its end may be distant. But if Sir Redvers Buller should again fail the result must be to leave Sir George White's force in extreme peril, to give the Boer forces the spirit of a veteran and victorious army, and to encourage the Dutch element at the Cape to take an active part against the British.

This is the situation which confronts Lord Roberts on his arrival at the Cape. The problem bears a general resemblance to that which Sir Redvers Buller had to solve at the beginning of November,

but there are important differences. Lord Roberts has in hand only a brigade, the twelfth or first of the sixth division, which has just reached Cape Town; he has to expect the rest of the sixth division, the seventh, a possible eighth, and a considerable extra force of mounted troops and of artillery; but the arrival of these forces will be gradual, and he will have no mass of fresh troops until the beginning of next month. Even then he may not have the means of feeding on the march the newly-arrived divisions. Meantime a British victory in Natal would be more valuable, a British defeat there more disastrous than ever. The effort ought to be made if there is a reasonable probability of success, for though failure would have disastrous consequences, material and moral, the admission of helplessness involved in making no attempt would depress the hearts of the British troops perhaps as fatally as a lost battle.

The first decision required is whether Sir Redvers Buller's force is to try its fate once

more. In all probability that decision has been made while Lord Roberts was at sea, and according to the event will be the situation with which the new Commander-in-Chief will have to deal. A victory in Natal will make his task easy; a failure will put before him a problem the fortunate solution of which would be a triumph for any commander.

THE DECISIVE BATTLE

January 18th, 1900

YESTERDAY began the action upon which in all probability depends the future course of the war. By the time these lines are in the reader's hands more will be known of the battle that can be guessed to-day by the wisest, though several days may pass before the result is fully known.

Sir Redvers Buller on Wednesday, the 10th, had under his command three infantry divisions, a cavalry brigade, some two thousand mounted in-

fantry, and probably altogether about eighty guns. Clery's division consists of Hildyard's and Lyttelton's brigades; the third division, comprising Hart's and Barton's brigades, is not known to have had a commander appointed; Warren's division is composed of Woodgate's brigade and of half of Coke's brigade, to which another half may have been added by taking two battalions which have been some time in Natal, and belong neither to Clery's nor to the third division. The whole force ought to be thirty thousand strong for a fight, taking the division at nine thousand instead of ten thousand, for though there have been losses there have also been drafts to fill up gaps. A party of mounted troops probably one thousand strong is reported to have been detached a few days ago by rail to Stanger on the coast near the mouth of the Tugela, and thence to have disappeared on a mission of which the purpose is as yet unknown, though it looks like a raid upon the railway between Dundee and Newcastle.

The strength of the Boers in Natal has never

been accurately known, and the estimates differ widely, ranging from thirty-five thousand to more than double that number. Sir George White may have nine thousand effectives at Ladysmith and might be contained by fifteen thousand Boers, perhaps by a smaller number. There will, therefore, be available against Sir Redvers Buller a force on the lowest estimate about equal to his own, and possibly outnumbering it by two to one.

On Wednesday, the 10th, the British force started westward. No telegram as yet gives its distribution, but it is plain that Clery's and Warren's divisions moved out, together with the cavalry brigade and whatever mounted infantry had not been sent south. Hart's and Barton's brigades, or one of them, with a proportion of artillery may be assumed to have been left in the entrenchments which face Colenso and cover the British line of communications by the railway. On Thursday morning Lord Dundonald with the cavalry brigade and some of the mounted infantry

was in possession of the hills overlooking Potgieter's Drift and of the pont or ferry-boat. The same day the infantry or the leading division, Clery's, was in the hills north of Springfield. Lord Dundonald's force commanded the river at Potgieter's Drift, and the crossing there was thus assured. A pause of four days followed: a pause probably not of inaction, but of strenuous preparation in order to make the final advance vigorous. During those days, no doubt, supplies would be accumulated at Springfield Bridge Camp, at Spearman's Farm, and at some point near to the next drift to the west. This would save delays when the advance began, for if the force depended upon magazines at Frere the transport would break down in the advance beyond the Tugela, whereas if the transport had in the later stages merely to start from the south side of the Tugela, the force could be kept supplied for a few days. Lord Dundonald was engaged in strengthening his position at Zwart's Kop, so that in any case there would be a secure

retreat across the river if need be. The river itself seems also to have been properly reconnoitred.

The enemy's position could be seen four or five miles to the north, and he was known on Thursday to be strongly entrenched. A passage for Warren's division was chosen at Trichardt's Drift five miles above Potgieter's and near to Wagon Drift which is marked on the sketch map issued by the Intelligence Division. From Trichardt's Drift there is evidently a road leading into the Bethany-Dewdrop Road, and parallel to that which runs from Potgieter's Drift. On Tuesday, the 16th, Lyttelton's brigade of infantry with a battery of howitzers crossed the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift and gained a line of hills to the north, probably the edge of the plateau on which lies the Boer position. The telegrams say nothing of bridge-making at Potgieter's Drift, but are explicit as to the crossing of at least some of the artillery. On Wednesday General Lyttelton shelled the Boer position with howitzers and naval guns without drawing a reply. This silence

of the Boer guns is correct for the defenders of a position, as a reply would enable the assailant to fix the position of the guns and to concentrate his fire upon them. The same day (Wednesday) Warren's division crossed the Tugela at Trichardt's Drift, and driving in the enemy's outposts secured a lodgment on the low wooded hills about a mile north of the river; this division, after its advance guard had crossed, was passed over by a pontoon bridge. The remainder of yesterday may have been spent in reconnaissance, bridge building—for an army that has crossed a river needs to have behind it as many bridges as possible—in bringing up all the forces destined for the battle, perhaps including Hildyard's brigade, and in making complete arrangements for the attack which was probably delivered this morning.

Sir Redvers Buller has aimed his blow in a right direction, for, if it can be delivered with effect, if he can drive the Boers back, their army will be in a perilous situation. The

plan evidently is that while Clery's division holds the Boers in front, Warren's should strike upon their right flank. If, then, the combined attack of the two divisions forces the Boers back the situation would be that the Boer army would have to retreat eastward across the Klip River, its retreat in any other direction being barred by the defences of Ladysmith, by Warren's and Clery's divisions, and by the British force in the lines at Chieveley. In such a situation a forced retreat would be disastrous for the Boers, as Sir Redvers Buller's two divisions would be nearer to the Boer line of retreat through Glencoe than the Boer army.

Of the probabilities of success it would be rash to speak. But though numbers are against the British we must never forget the splendid qualities which British troops have displayed in the past and which, as the actions of this war have proved, are possessed by our officers and men to-day. The experiences of the last

few weeks have taught them what are the formations to avoid and have shown them that they shoot at least as well as the Boers. We may, therefore, hope for victory even against numbers.

But even if Sir Redvers Buller finds positions as strong as that at Colenso, the Boers will probably be baulked of their prey, the garrison of Ladysmith. Sir George White has with him the flower of the British Army, and he does not mean to be reduced by degrees to the extremity of famine and helplessness. During Sir Redvers Buller's attack the Ladysmith's force will not be idle, but will attack the Boers who are investing the place. Signals must have been prearranged between the two commanders, and it can hardly be doubted that if and when Sir George White should have reason to believe that Sir Redvers Buller may be unable to force his way through the Boer positions he would himself set out to cut his way through the investing lines, and at whatever sacrifice to

carry the remnant of his force into Sir Redvers Buller's camp, and thus to vindicate the honour of the British arms and the character of the British soldier.

SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

January 25th, 1900

THE decisive operation is proceeding slowly but surely. On Wednesday, the 10th, Lord Dundonald reached the south bank of the Tugela at Potgieter's Drift, and on Thursday a brigade of infantry was up with him. A week later, on Wednesday, the 17th, Lyttleton's brigade crossed by the drift, and Warren's wing of the Army began the passage by a pontoon bridge at Trichardt's or Wagon Drift. On Thursday, the 18th, Dundonald was on the high road west of Acton Homes, and drove away a party of Boers.

North of the Tugela there is a great crescent-

shaped plateau three or four miles across at the widest part. The crescent has its convex side to the south-west. One of its horns touches the Acton Homes—Ladysmith road; its broadest part bulges south towards the river bank between Wagon Drift and the loop near Potgieter's Drift; its other limb is broken into irregular heights, Brakfontein kopje apparently marking its south-eastern apex. On the concave north-eastern side Spion Kop is about at the centre, and is four miles north of Wagon Drift. The plateau is three or four hundred feet above the river and Spion Kop about the same height above the plateau. Near the northern apex rises the Blaauwbank River, which flows eastward towards Ladysmith along the foot of an east and west range, a spur from the Drakensberg mountains jutting out so as to separate the Van Reenen's road and valley from the valley followed by the Acton Homes—Ladysmith road.

When Warren crossed the river he found the western half of the crescent held by the enemy.

Whatever his original design, which may have been to take his whole force to Acton Homes, and then march eastward along the road, he had to drive the Boers from the plateau. His action was deliberate, without hurry, but without waste of time. The troops had been prepared for tactics better suited to their weapons, the bullet and the shell, to the enemy's weapons, and to the ground, than the rapid advance and charge, which was the plan of earlier actions in this war. The view that the bullet should do its work before the appeal to the bayonet is made had at length asserted itself. Moreover, the need for method in attack had been recognised; first reconnaissance, then shelling; during the shelling the deployment of the infantry in extended and flexible order, then the musketry duel supported by the artillery; and then, as the infantry fire proves stronger than the enemy's, an advance from point to point in order to bring it to closer and more deadly range; last of all, if and where it may be needed, the charge. These sound

tactics—the only tactics appropriate to modern firearms—cannot be hurried, for to charge men armed with the magazine rifle and not yet shaken is to sacrifice your troops to their own bravery.

Warren's attack then was rightly deliberate. On Friday, the 19th, he was reconnoitring and feeling for the enemy. On Saturday the shooting match began. It was continued throughout Sunday, and was not over on Tuesday. During these days the British were making way, gradually and not without loss, but steadily. There were, no doubt, pauses for renewing order, for reinforcing, and for securing the ground won. On Tuesday evening Spion Kop was still held by the Boers, who seem even then not to have been driven off the plateau, but to have been clinging to its eastern edge. On Tuesday night Spion Kop was taken. It was assaulted, probably in the dark, by surprise, and the Boers driven off. Even on Wednesday the Boers were tenaciously resisting the advance, making heavy attacks on Spion Kop and using their artillery with effect.

At midnight between Wednesday and Thursday Sir Redvers Buller telegraphed home Sir Charles Warren's opinion that the enemy's position had been rendered untenable, and added his own judgment of the behaviour of the British troops in the words, "the men are splendid."

All through the week Lyttelton's brigade has been facing a force of the enemy on the eastern limb of the plateau in front of Potgieter's Drift. He has not pressed an attack but has kept his infantry back, not pushing them forward to close range, but contenting himself with shelling the Boer positions.

Sir Redvers Buller before the troops left the camps beside the railway had six infantry brigades. There are indications in the telegrams of a reorganisation and redistribution of battalions among the brigades, so that it is hardly safe to speak with certainty as to the present composition and distribution of the commands. Apparently the left wing under Warren consists of three or four infantry brigades, the cavalry

brigade, and most of the mounted infantry, and five or six batteries. Sir Charles Warren himself appears to keep the general direction of this wing in his own hands. Sir F. Clery either commands a division (two brigades), the third brigade being led by its brigadier, under Sir Charles Warren's direction, or Sir F. Clery is supervising the whole of the infantry advance. Lyttelton has his own brigade, and Barton's brigade covers the railhead at Chieveley. That accounts for five of the six brigades. The sixth is Coke's, of Warren's division. We do not at present know whether this is with Warren on the left wing or with Buller as a general reserve to be put in to the fight at the decisive moment.

The great difficulties of day-after-day fighting, which has been regarded for some years as the normal character of future battles, is to secure for the men the food and rest without which they must soon collapse, and to ensure the continuous supply of ammunition. If these difficulties can be overcome Sir Redvers Bullers has a good

chance of success in his endeavour to relieve Ladysmith. Once driven from the plateau by Warren, the Boers must retire several miles before they can reach a second defensive position, and their retirement may be hastened by pressure on their flanks, which is to be expected from Dundonald's mounted infantry and cavalry, probably now on the right or northern flank of the Boer line, as well as from Lyttelton on their left. A small reinforcement would give a fresh impetus to the British advance. If Coke's brigade has not yet been engaged Sir Redvers Buller will know when and where to use it—either to reinforce Lyttelton for a blow against the Boer line of retreat or to reinforce Warren's left. The arrival of the *Kildonan Castle* at Durban this morning, as far as we know, with drafts for some of the battalions, is better than nothing, for the drafts will give fresh vigour to the bodies that receive them. They cannot reach the fighting line before Saturday, but their arrival then may be most opportune. Still better would it be if a

fresh brigade should arrive while the struggle continues. There was at least a brigade available at Cape Town a few days ago, and it could not have been better employed than in strengthening Buller at any point where he can feed it, at Chieveley if not as a reinforcement to Warren or Lyttelton, for a fresh brigade at Chieveley would enable Barton to put pressure on the Boers in his front.

Supposing that Warren has by this time compelled the retreat of the Boers from the plateau for which he has been fighting, what can the Boers do to resist Buller's further advance? They must try to hold a second position. Two such positions appear to be open to them, if we may judge by the not very full maps available. The line of hills from Bulbarrow Hill on the north to the hill near Arnot Hill Farm on the south might give good opportunities for defence; it blocks the road to Ladysmith, for the Boers occupying the line would be right across these roads. Another plan would be for the Boers to

retreat to the north-east on to the east and west ridge, which commands from the north the Acton Homes—Dewdrop road. If the Boers took this position the roads to Ladysmith, or to the rear of the investing lines, would be open. But Sir Redvers Buller could not advance along them with the Boer forces menacing his flank, and he would be obliged either to attack them or to contain them by extending a force along their front to hold its ground against them while he pushed the rest of his force towards Ladysmith. Whether this would be a prudent plan for the Boers depends upon their numbers, and if they are strong enough they might combine both plans.

It is, however, by no means certain that Lord Dundonald is unable to prevent the Boers from crossing the Blaauwbank Spruit. He has not been heard of for a week, and has had plenty of time to have his force in position to the north of Clydesdale Farm, unless, indeed, he has been kept in hand behind Warren's left flank ready for pursuit after the capture of the great plateau.

The situation continues to be critical, and must be so until the fate of Ladysmith is decided. Our own men are justifying to the full the confidence reposed in them; what men can do they will accomplish. But the Boers are fighting stubbornly, and may be able to wear out Sir Redvers Buller's force before their own resistance collapses. We at home must wait patiently, hoping for the best but prepared for fresh efforts. At least we ought all now to realise that the splendid behaviour of our soldiers in the field lays upon us as citizens the duty of securing for the future the best possible treatment of those who are so generous of their lives.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

February 1st, 1900

If on Tuesday the Bank of England had announced that it could not meet its obligations I imagine that there would have been a certain amount of uneasiness in the City and elsewhere, and that some at least of the rich men to be found in London would have put their heads together to see what could be done to meet a grave emergency.

On Tuesday a failure was indeed announced—a failure which must involve the Bank of England and most of the great banking and trading corporations of this country. But no one seems to have taken action upon it, and I see no visible sign of general alarm. The Prime Minister, speaking in his place in the House of Lords and on behalf of the National Government, said: "I do not believe in the perfection of the British Constitution as an instrument of war . . . it is evident there is something in your machinery

that is wrong." That was Lord Salisbury's explanation and defence of the failure of his Government in the diplomacy which preceded the war, in the preparations for the war, and in the conduct of the war. It was a declaration of bankruptcy—a plain statement by the Government that it cannot govern. The announcement was not made to Parliament with closed doors and the reporters excluded. It was made to the whole world, to the British Nation, and to all the rivals of Great Britain. Parliament did not take any action upon the declaration. No committee of both Houses was formed to consider how without delay to make a Government that can govern. The ordinary normal routine of public and private life goes on. Thus in the crisis of the Nation's fate we are ungoverned and unled, and to all appearance we are content to be so, and the leader-writers trained in the tradition of respectable formalism interpret the Nation's apathy as fortitude.

Lord Salisbury's confession of impotence was

true. From the beginning to the end of this business the Government has lacked the manliness to do its plain duty. In the first half of July, before the official reports of the Bloemfontein conference were published, everyone but the disciples of Mr. Morley knew that the only honourable course, after the Government's declaration prior to the conference and after what there took place, was to insist on the acceptance by the South African Republic of the Bloemfontein proposals and to back up that insistence by adequate military preparations. It is admitted that this was not done, and what is the excuse now made? Mr. Balfour told the House of Commons on Tuesday, January 30th, that if in August a vote of credit had been demanded "we should not have been able to persuade the House that the necessity for the vote was pressing and urgent." The Government charged with the defence of the Empire excuses itself for not having made preparations for that task on the ground that perhaps the House of Commons would not

have given its approval. Yet the Government had a great majority at its back, and there is no instance in recent times of a vote of credit having been rejected by the House of Commons. This shameful cowardice was exhibited although, as we now know but could not then have imagined, the Government had in its possession the protest of the Government of Natal against the intention of the Imperial Government to abandon the northern portion of that colony. The Natal Ministers on July 25th confidentially communicated their extreme surprise at learning that in case of sudden hostilities it would not be possible with the garrison and colonial forces available to defend the northern portion of the colony.

After shilly-shallying from May to September the Government began its preparations, and the Boers as soon as they were ready began the war. Of the conduct of the war the readers of *The London Letter* have had an account week by week, as to the truth of which they can judge

for themselves, for the facts are there by which it can be tested. The attempt has been made to refrain from any criticism which could hurt the feelings of the generals, who are doing their duty to the best of their power in most trying circumstances. But is it not plain that the British Army has been hampered by a lack of sound strategy and of sound tactics such as indicate prolonged previous neglect of these branches of study and training? Who is responsible to the Nation for the training of the Army? The Government and the Government alone. If any military officer has not done his work effectively —if, for example, the Commander-in-Chief has not taught his generals rightly or not selected them properly—who is responsible to Parliament for that? Not the officer, even if he be the Commander-in-Chief, for the Commander-in-Chief is the servant of the Cabinet and responsible to the Cabinet, which if it were dissatisfied with him ought to have dismissed him. Authority over the Army is in the hands

of the Secretary of State for War as the delegate of the Cabinet. Lord Lansdowne has held his post only since 1895, and cannot be held responsible for the training of the older generals; but before him came Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman who for some years had charge of the preparation of the Army for war as the delegate of the late Cabinet. For the state of the Army, for the strategical and tactical training which has resulted in so many failures, the politicians of both front benches, who in turn have neglected these vital matters, are responsible.

Here we are, then, in the middle of the war, without a Government, but with a body of men who fill the place of a Government while admitting themselves incompetent to do the work entrusted to them and for which they are paid. The war so far has consisted of a succession of repulses, which at any moment may culminate in disaster. Sir Redvers Buller has twice led his Army to defeat and is about to lead it a third time—to what? Possibly to victory; we all hope

that it may be to victory. But possibly to a third defeat which would mean not merely the loss of the force at Ladysmith; it would mean that Sir Redvers Buller's Army in its turn would need succour, and that the plan, so much favoured by the strategists of the Army, of a march through the Free State would be hampered. For the final and decisive defeat of Sir Redvers Buller would be followed by the long-deferred general rising of the Cape Dutch, and probably enough by the action of one or more of the European Powers. *The Times* of to-day announces that a foreign Government has ordered a large supply of steam coal from the Welsh collieries. That can mean but one thing, that some foreign Power is getting its Navy ready for action.

What, then, is the situation to-day? That any day may bring the gravest news from South Africa, to be followed possibly by an ultimatum from a foreign coalition. In that event the Nation will have to choose between abandoning

its Empire in obedience to foreign dictation, an abandonment which would mean National ruin, and a war for existence, a war for which no preparation has been made, which the Government is incompetent to conduct, and which would begin by a naval conflict during which it would be impossible to assist the Army in South Africa.

That is the situation. It may take a turn for better; you cannot be quite sure that a storm which you see brewing may not pass off, but the probabilities are that the struggle for existence is at hand. What then is our duty, the duty of every one of us? To support the Government which cannot govern? Not for a moment, but to get rid of it as soon as possible and to make at once a Government that will try. Lord Rosebery at least sees the situation and understands the position. There is no other public man who commands such general confidence, and it is practically certain that if the Cabinet were compelled to resign by an adverse vote of the House of Commons Lord Rosebery would be

the first statesman to be consulted by the Queen. Lord Rosebery could make a Government to-morrow if he would ignore parties and pick out the competent men wherever they are to be found. Any new Cabinet, except one containing Mr. Morley or Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, would be given a chance. The House of Commons would wait a few weeks to see how it bore itself. If there were prompt evidences of knowledge and will in the measures adopted, even though half the Ministers or all of them except Lord Rosebery were new men, there would soon be a feeling of confidence, and the Nation, knowing that it was led, would respond with enthusiasm. In that case Great Britain might make a good fight, though no one who knows the state of our preparations and those of the rest of the world will make a sanguine prediction as to the result.

TRY, TRY, TRY AGAIN

February 8th, 1900

SIR REDVERS BULLER on Monday set out on his third attempt to relieve Ladysmith. He appears to have made a feint against the Boer position north of Potgieter's Drift, and, while there attracting the attention of the Boers by the concentrated fire of many guns, to have pushed a force of infantry and artillery across the river to the right of Potgieter's Drift. This force, of which the infantry belongs to Lyttelton's brigade, carried and defended against counter attack a hill called Vaal Krantz, at the eastern end of the Brakfontein ridge. To the east of Vaal Krantz runs a good road to Ladysmith, along which the distance from the Tugela to Sir George's White's outposts is about ten miles. To the east again of the road is a hill called Dorn Kop. Here the Boers have an artillery position which seems to command Vaal Krantz, and they

probably have the usual infantry trenches. The Boer position then faces the Tugela and runs from Spion Kop on the west, the Boer left, to Dorn Kop on the east, the Boer right. Sir Redvers Buller's attack is an attempt to pierce the centre of this position.

To break the centre of an enemy's line, to pour your forces into and through the gap, and then roll up the more important of his divided wings, is an operation which if it can be successfully executed makes a decisive victory; if followed up it ruins the enemy's army. But it is in modern conditions the most difficult form of attack. The long range of modern weapons, of guns that kill at two miles and of rifles that kill at a mile—to take a moderate estimate of their power—enables the defender to concentrate upon any attack against his centre the fire of all the rifles in his front line for a couple of miles, and of all the guns standing on a length of four miles. A similar concentration of fire is only occasionally and temporary possible for the assailant, though if it

should happen that the ground exposes a point of the defender's line to such concentric fire, while it protects some points held by the assailant, the attack would have a prospect of success. But the moment the point of attack is recognised by the defender he will collect every available battery and rifleman from all parts of his line and place them on that portion of his front which commands the path of the assailant. To prevent this the assailant must engage the defender along his whole line so that all the defending forces are fully occupied and there are none to spare for the critical point or region.

Sir Redvers Buller's task is rendered harder by the fact that his own troops before they can attack must cross the Tugela. He has two bridges at the point here supposed to have been selected for the main attack, but troops can hardly cross a bridge at a quicker rate than a brigade an hour, and as the Boers ride faster than the British infantry can walk, and as the British troops south of the river cannot effectually

engage the Boers, it will not have been easy so to occupy the enemy along the whole front as to prevent his massing guns and rifles—at any rate rifles—to defend his centre.

So much for the initial difficulties, which seem by a combination of feint and surprise to have been so far overcome on Monday that the advanced British troops effected a lodgment in the centre of the Boer position, from which a counter-attack failed to eject them. The next thing is, as the British force is brought across the river, to attack one of the Boer wings while containing or keeping back the other. Before this can be done the enemy's centre must really be pierced, so that troops can be poured through the gap to turn the flank of one of the enemy's divided halves. This piercing is most difficult in the conditions of to-day, for the enemy by establishing a new firing line behind the point carried by our troops may be able to enclose in a semicircle of fire the party that has made its way into the position. Against such

an enveloping fire it is a hard task to make headway.

All these aspects of his problem a General thinks out before he starts; he does not make his attempt unless and until he sees his way to meet the various difficulties, both those inherent in the nature of the operation and those that arise from the local conditions and from the character of the particular enemy. The difficulties are therefore not reasons why General Buller should not succeed, but their consideration may help to show why with the best previous deliberation and with the bravest of troops he may perhaps not be able to break the Boer resistance.

There is one feature of his task that is perhaps not fully appreciated by the public. In order to relieve Ladysmith he must thoroughly defeat and drive away the Boer army—must, so to speak break its back. For, supposing he could clear a road to Ladysmith and march there, leaving the Boer army in position on one or both sides of his road, his position on reaching the place would

be that he would have to fight his way back again, and that unless he could then defeat the Boers his Army would be lost, for it would be cut off from its supplies. The relief of Ladysmith and the complete defeat of the Boer army are therefore synonymous terms. There is, however, a sense in which a partial defeat of the Boers would be of use. If the Boer army, though not driven off, were yet fully absorbed in its struggle with Sir Redvers Buller and had drawn to its assistance some portion of the force investing Ladysmith, it might be possible for Sir George White to make a sortie and to break through the investing lines. To that case, however, the term "the relief of Ladysmith" could hardly be correctly applied.

How far Sir George White can co-operate with Sir Redvers Buller depends partly upon the mobility of his force. His horses after three months in Ladysmith can hardly be in much condition, even supposing that they have not already begun to be used as food for the troops.

Supposing there are horses enough for the field guns, and that the naval guns and mountain guns were destroyed at the last moment before the sortie. The men and the field artillery would then have to make a night attack, followed by a march of about seven miles in trying conditions, and by a second attack in which they would join hands with Sir Redvers Buller. This does not imply exertions impossible to troops like Sir George White's, and such a move perhaps offers the best way out of the difficulties of the situation. If in that case Sir George White made for the north side of Dorn Kop a part of the Boer army would probably be destroyed, and the loss which the British force would have suffered would thus to some extent be made up for. It is presumed that Sir Redvers Buller and Sir George White, who are able to communicate with one another, have a cipher which enables them to inform each other without informing the enemy.

Any plan which will unite Sir George White's

force, or the bulk of it, with that of Sir Redvers Buller on the Tugela will simplify the whole problem of the War. Lord Roberts is preparing for an advance in force from the Orange River, which will sooner or later transfer the centre of gravity to the western theatre of War, in which the British troops will not be confronted by the difficulties of an unknown or very imperfectly known mountainous region. The movements now taking place in the Cape Colony are the preliminaries to that advance. The method, the only right method, is to use the reinforcements that have arrived — the sixth and seventh divisions — to secure a preponderance first at one point and then at another, instead of distributing them evenly over the whole area and the various points of contact. The idea would seem to be, first, to strengthen General French until he has crushed the Boer force with which he is dealing, then to use his troops to secure the defeat of the Boers who are opposing Sir William Gatacre, and then to cross

the Orange River with three divisions and deal a blow against the Boer army that is now between the Riet River and Kimberley. This plan of beating in detail the Boer forces in the western theatre of war, if carried out so as to lead in each case to a crushing defeat of the Boers, would be the prelude to a collision between the main Boer army and a British force its superior in every respect. The first certain evidence that some such idea is at the foundation of the new operations may be hailed as the beginning of victory. For the present it is enough to know that the departure of Lord Roberts from Cape Town augurs the opening of an energetic campaign with that unity of direction in a strong hand which is the first element of success in war.

A COMMANDER

February 15th, 1900

IN war, as in other great enterprises, the first element of success is unity of direction in a strong hand. The reason is that whenever the co-operation of large numbers is involved the needful concentration of purpose can be supplied only by the head man, the leader or director. Concentration of purpose means in war the arrangement in due perspective of all the various objectives, the selection of the most important of them, the distribution of forces according to the importance of the blows to be delivered, of which some one is always decisive. To the decisive point, then, the bulk of the forces are directed, and at other points small forces are left to make shift as well as they can, unless, indeed, there is a superabundance of force—not a common phenomenon.

The same principle of concentration prescribes

that action when once begun should, at any rate at the decisive point, be sudden, rapid, and continuous. These fundamental ideas are illustrated by the practice of all the great commanders, and there is perhaps no better definition of a great commander than one whose action illustrates the simple principles of war. Lord Roberts is once more revealing to his countrymen the nature of these principles. The tangled mass of the war has suddenly become simplified, and there is clearness where there was confusion.

The Commander-in-Chief reached Cape Town on January 10th, and found large forces dispersed over a front of two or three hundred miles, the reinforcements at sea, and the transport still in a state very like confusion. By February 6th, two or three weeks earlier than was anticipated by those at home who had the most perfect confidence in him, he was on his way to the front, enabling those at home to draw the certain inference that all was ready, the divisions assembled, and the

transport in order. While he was travelling the six hundred miles from Cape Town to the Modder River various preliminary moves which he had ordered were in course of execution. There had been a large display of British infantry near Colesberg, covering the withdrawal of General French and the cavalry division. This had the effect of causing the Boers to reinforce Colesberg, probably by detachments from Magersfontein. The British infantry, however, was there only to lure the Boers; it was composed of parts of the sixth division on the way further north, and only a small infantry force was left to hold the reinforced Boers in check. The next move was a reconnaissance in force from Modder River to Koodoosberg Drifts, which drew Commandant Cronje's attention and some of his troops to his right flank. The reconnaissance had the further object of inspiriting the Highland Brigade which had been so badly damaged at Magersfontein, and of establishing good relations between these troops and their new commander, General Mac-

Donald. On their return to camp a short address from Lord Roberts had the effect upon them that Napoleon's proclamations used to produce on the French troops. A day or two was spent in completing the organisation of the force at Modder River, where a new division, the ninth, had been formed probably of troops brought up from the communications. The mounted infantry were also brigaded, as had been those at Orange River Station. Meantime various movements had been going on of which the details as yet are unreported. Two infantry divisions, the sixth and seventh, the last two from England, were moving towards the Riet River to the East of Jacobsdal. The point or points from which they started are not known, nor the direction of their march, which was screened by the cavalry division and perhaps also by a brigade of mounted infantry. At any rate on Sunday, the 11th inst., Hannay's brigade of mounted infantry from Orange River, on the march to Ramdam, had to cover its right flank against a party of Boers. Ramdam is not to be found, but

if it is on the Riet above Jacobsdal the probability is that Hannay's brigade was covering the right flank of the infantry divisions.

On Monday French with his cavalry brigade seized a drift or ford across the Riet ten or a dozen miles above Jacobsdal, and the two infantry divisions were so close behind him that on Tuesday Lord Roberts could report them both encamped beyond the river. On Tuesday French was off again to the north with a cavalry brigade, a mounted infantry brigade, and a horse artillery brigade, a second cavalry brigade under Colonel Gordon moving on his right. By half-past five French was across the Modder River, having forced a drift and seized the hills beyond so as to secure the passage for the infantry, while Gordon had seized two drifts further to the west. Between them the two cavalry commanders had captured five Boer laagers, and the slightness of the opposition they encounter proves that the Boers were completely surprised. On Wednesday morning

the sixth division was on the march to follow the cavalry, and the seventh division was to take the same direction on Wednesday afternoon.

These are all the facts reported until now, Thursday afternoon. Let us see what they mean. First of all, Lord Roberts has chosen his objective, the Boer force before Kimberley, on the right flank of the Boer front Stormberg—Colesberg—Magersfontein. A blow delivered here and followed by a march into the Free State places Lord Roberts on the communications of the Boers now at Stormberg and Colesberg and between the two halves of the Boer army, of which one is on the border of Cape Colony and the other in Natal. The objective, therefore, has been chosen with strategical insight. In the next place forces have been concentrated for the blow. Lord Roberts has four infantry divisions, a cavalry brigade, and at least one brigade of mounted infantry, his total strength amounting to at least fifty thousand men. Then there has been a skilful and successful attempt to distract

the enemy's attention, to conceal from him the nature of the movement and the force to be employed, and last, but not least, there has been the suddenness and the rapidity of movement essential to surprise. These are the proofs of that breadth and simplicity of conception and of that mastery in execution which are the marks of the best generalship.

But there is in the best work more than breadth of mind and strength of hand. The details fit in with the design and repay the closest scrutiny. The march of twenty-five thousand men round Jacobsdal towards the Modder tactically turns the Boer position at Magersfontein, so that it need not be carried by a frontal attack. But it also places the British force on the direct line of the Boer communications with Bloemfontein, and if Commandant Cronje values these communications he must either make a precipitate retreat by Boshof, offering his flank during the process to attack by French, or must attack the sixth and seventh divisions on their

march from the Riet to the Modder. But in either case he has to reckon with the Guards and ninth divisions which are not mentioned in the telegrams, but which are assuredly not idle. Lord Methuen has long held a crossing on to the peninsula or Doab between the two rivers, and the advance of a division into this peninsula must compel the prompt evacuation of Jacobsdal or bring about the ruin of any Boer force there, while at the same time it would increase the weight of troops that intervene between Magersfontein and Bloemfontein. A single division is a more than ample force to cover the British railhead at Modder River. Commandant Cronje may elect to fight where he is, which would be to court disaster, for he would be attacked from the east in great force, with no retreat open except to the west away from his base, and with a considerable river, the Vaal, to cross. Such a retreat after a lost battle and under the pressure of pursuit would be ruin to his army. He may move off by Boshof, but that would be

impracticable unless the start were made soon after the first news of the British advance. On Wednesday he would have only the mounted troops to deal with; even on Thursday (to-day) the sixth division could hardly be used with effect on the north bank of the Modder, but on Friday he would have the sixth and seventh divisions to reckon with. Probably his best course would be to retire before he can be attacked to Barkly, on the right bank of the Vaal. He would there be in a position most difficult to attack, and yet his presence there on the flank of any British advance either to the north or to the east would make it impossible to neglect him. His decision has been taken before now, or this opinion would have been suppressed out of deference to the anxiety of those who imagine that strategical advice is telegraphed from London to the Boer headquarters.

Of the effect of the new move upon the general course of the war it would be premature to enlarge. We must wait and see the close of

the first act. The most effective issue of this week's movements would be a battle leading to the thorough defeat, the military destruction, of the Boer army before Kimberley. A less valuable result would be the raising of the siege of Kimberley without fighting, a result which is not to be preferred, because a force that retires before battle has to be fought later on. For this reason the true Boer game is to retreat in time.

It will be interesting to watch the effect of the new campaign upon the ripening resolve of the British Nation to have its Army set in order. Upon many minds, and no doubt upon Ministers and their adherents, the impression made by success in the field will be that reform is needless. The true impression would be that it is as urgent as before, and that the right way to begin is to give authority to the right man, the commander who is now revealing his strength.

CRONJE'S SEDAN

February 22nd, 1900

A week ago the news was that Lord Roberts had begun his movement, that he was moving with fifty thousand men against Commandant Cronje, and that General French with the cavalry division had crossed the Modder, the sixth and seventh divisions following him between the Riet and the Modder.

The great object was to strike down Cronje's force before it could receive help, and the design must have been to cut off his retreat to the eastward. On Thursday, the 15th, French marched from the Modder to Alexandersfontein, attacked the rear of the Boer line investing Kimberley, and in the evening entered the town. He had left the sixth division at the drifts of the Modder. This movement of French's appeared to imply that Cronje's army was known to be retreating to the west or north-west, and that French took the road through Kimberley as the shortest way to reach a position where that retreat could be

intercepted. It could hardly be imagined that the move was made for the sake of Kimberley, of which the relief was assured whether Cronje stood to fight or retreated in any direction. The essential thing was to find where Cronje's force was—if it was at Magersfontein to surround it or drive it to the west; if elsewhere to delay it with the cavalry and pursue it with the infantry. But Cronje was not found. When French was in Kimberley, Cronje, retreating eastwards, passed through the fifteen miles gap between the town and Kelly-Kenny. Kelly-Kenny on Friday discovered this and set off in pursuit while French was following a Boer force retreating northwards, probably part of the force that had invested Kimberley. Kelly-Kenny shelled the Boer laager and captured a number of waggons, but the Boers retreated eastwards along the north bank of the Modder with Kelly-Kenny at their heels. To assist Kelly-Kenny French was recalled from the north, and Macdonald with the Highland Brigade pushed out by a forced march from Jacobsdal. Accounts differ as to the site of the fighting,

but there was a three days' running fight, during which Cronje may have crossed the Modder and approached Paardeberg or may have been stopped on the north bank. The Boer reports, which imply at least that Cronje was hard pressed, were sent off before the finish, and the first British official reports, consisting only in a list of officers killed and wounded, show that each of the three infantry brigades had hard fighting with considerable losses.

Of eight infantry brigades with which Lord Roberts began his movement three were engaged against Cronje; one has probably been sent to Kimberley, with which town railway communication has been re-opened, so that it will be soon an advanced base for the Army. Lord Roberts, therefore, who was at Paardeberg on Monday evening, may have had with him four brigades or two divisions, representing twenty thousand men, besides the three brigades engaged, which represented before the battle something like fifteen thousand.

Of French and the cavalry division there is no report. The Boers publish a telegram from

Commandant de Wet, who seems to have brought up reinforcements while Cronje's action was in progress on Sunday.

The Boer commander evidently counted on reinforcements from all quarters; a party from Colesberg cut off a British waggon train at the Riet on or about Friday, the 16th, and reinforcements from Natal arrived during Cronje's action. Lord Roberts has thus drawn the Boers away from the circumference towards the centre. He has lightened the tasks of Buller, Clements, Gatacre, and Brabant, but has thereby brought the chief load on to his own shoulders. It seems a misfortune that Cronje was able to escape eastwards from Magersfontein, though it would be wrong until full knowledge of what took place is obtained to assume that this could have been avoided.

Cronje, however, has not been able to make good his escape. A Reuter's telegram from Paardeberg dated Tuesday explicitly states that Cronje's force was enclosed and remained enclosed. Lord Roberts on Tuesday reported that

after examination of the enemy's position by reconnaissance in force, he decided to avoid the heavy loss involved in an assault, but to bombard the enemy and to turn his attention to the approaching reinforcements. The result was that the reinforcements were driven off and dispersed with heavy loss to them and trifling loss to the British. This seems to have been effected on Tuesday. Boer prisoners reported that they have come from Ladysmith, and the commander of the reinforcements is said to have been Commandant Botha, who was last heard of at Spion Kop. On Tuesday also the shelling of Cronje's position is said to have induced him to ask for an armistice, which must be assumed to be the prelude to a surrender; at any rate the request would hardly be granted except to settle the terms of a capitulation or to enable the Boer general to be told that unconditional surrender was the only alternative to a continuance of the bombardment.

The advance into the Free State implied that Lord Roberts meant to take the benefit of acting

on "interior lines," that is, in plain English, of getting in between his enemies and striking them in turn before they can unite or combine. This plan required him with his main body to attack the enemy's reinforcements in detail as they came up. In that way he secured time for the completion of the action against Cronje, and upon its favourable issue he will be master of the situation.

In Natal the situation has been changed by the action of Lord Roberts. The two Boer Republics are well aware that they must stand or fall together. Either the Boer Commander-in-Chief has decided to strike at Lord Roberts, in which case he must move the bulk of his force into the Free State, or he hopes to be in time to resist Lord Roberts after making an end of Sir George White. In the former case he must raise the siege of Ladysmith, for he cannot carry it on without a strong covering force to resist Sir Redvers Buller. Then there will be forty thousand British troops in Natal, whose advance will be almost as dangerous as that of Lord Roberts. In the latter case there can be little chance of a

successful resistance to Lord Roberts, whose advance northwards from Bloemfontein would in due time compromise the safety of the Boer army. The reports do not enable us to feel sure which decision has been taken. Sir Redvers Buller's telegram of Wednesday to the effect that one of his divisions had crossed the Tugela and was opposed only by a rear guard looks very like a Boer withdrawal from Natal. A later unofficial telegram, describing a very strong position north of the Tugela held by the Boers to cover the siege, suggests that the Boer commander is again trying to lead his adversary into attack upon a prepared position. Each case has its favourable aspect. If the Boers are raising the siege the forces of Buller and White will in a few days be united, and need only good leading to force the passes and invade either the Free State or the Transvaal. If the Boers are determined to hold on to Ladysmith, they cannot effectively check the advance of Lord Roberts.

While the war is going on the Nation ought to set its military forces in order. The Militia

should be formed into divisions for the field and be shipped off to manœuvring grounds at the Cape; they can be brought home as soon as it is certain they will not be wanted. The Volunteers could soon be formed into an army if the War Office would carry out the measures which have for years been urged upon it by Volunteer officers. The first step is to give the officers the authority which has hitherto been withheld from them, so that by its exercise they may form their characters; the second to give them the best instruction and encouragements to learn; the third to find them ground for ranges, for field firing and for manœuvres. A minister of war who combined knowledge of war and of the Volunteers with a serious purpose would be able in two months to infuse the whole Volunteer force with the right ideal, and then, by mobilising them for another two months, to transform them into an army. It is for the Navy and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to secure the four months that are needed.

THE BOER DEFEATS

March 1st, 1900

FEBRUARY has made up for the blunders of August and September, and retrieved the disasters of October, November, and December.

On Tuesday the 27th, Commandant Cronje with four thousand men, the remains of his army, surrendered to Lord Roberts at Paardeberg; the same day, Sir Redvers Buller attacked and carried the Boer position near Pieters, in front of Ladysmith, and on Wednesday the 28th, Lord Dundonald with two mounted regiments, entered Ladysmith.

The fighting in the Free State and in Natal has been simultaneous, and it may be worth while briefly to review the two campaigns. Lord Roberts set out from Modder River on Monday the 12th. On that day began the march of his force to the attack of Cronje. French with the cavalry seized Dekiel's Drift on the Riet and was followed by two infantry divisions. Next day, Tuesday the 13th,

French was holding the drifts of the Modder, and on Thursday morning the sixth division was at Klip Drift. Thereupon French pushed on with his cavalry to Kimberley. The same night Cronje marched off between Kimberley and Klip Drift, making eastwards along the north bank of the Modder, which he was to cross near Paardeberg. But his march was discovered. He was followed and attacked on Friday the 10th by the advance guard of the sixth division, which detained him at the crossing of the river. The Highland Brigade made a forced march to intercept him on the south bank, and between Friday and Sunday, the 16th and 18th, he was surrounded and driven back into a position formed by the river banks. Here, from the 17th to the 27th, he held out against a bombardment, while the British forces, pushing their trenches gradually nearer, were preparing for an assault. Lord Roberts had brought up the bulk of his force, and parried with ease the attacks of two or three parties of Boers who came up in succession to Cronje's assistance; some of them having been sent for the purpose from

Northern Natal. On Tuesday, February 27th, the anniversary of Majuba, Cronje surrendered.

The effects of this campaign against Cronje were felt at once in various parts of the theatre of war. The advance of Lord Roberts and the retreat of Cronje carried with them the relief of Kimberley. It drew away the Boers from the Colesberg district, so that on the 26th General Clements was able to enter Colesberg, which had been evacuated, and on the 27th, to move his troops forward from Arundel to Rensburg.

Lord Roberts had arranged for other action simultaneous with his own. On Friday, the 16th, General Brabant with his Cape Mounted Division attacked the Boers near Dordrecht and defeated them. A week later he was in Jamestown, the Boers were retreating towards the Orange River, and the rebels in Barkly East were asking for terms, receiving the answer that there were no terms but unconditional surrender.

On Wednesday the 14th, while French was leading the advance from Dekiel's Drift to the Modder, Sir Redvers Buller took Hussar Hill,

north-east of Chieveley. Four days later, on Sunday the 18th, he fought a considerable battle at Monte Cristo, a point of the Inhlawe range, the capture of which turned Hlangwane Hill and led to its capture next day, Monday the 19th. On Tuesday the 20th, Buller's advance guard crossed the Tugela near Colenso. On Wednesday the 21st, the river was bridged, and three brigades crossed to the north bank. The fighting then became continuous. On Friday there was a determined attack by the Irish brigade upon a Boer position west of the railway near Pieters. The assault failed and the troops suffered heavily, but the British force maintained the general line of front which it had gained. On Monday the 26th, a fresh bridge was thrown across the Tugela, a mile or two east of the railway line, and on Tuesday the 27th, Pieters Hill, east of Pieters Station, in the prolongation of the Boer front, was stormed by General Barton, whereupon the whole British force renewed the attack in front upon the Boer positions west of the railway and carried them, dispersing the enemy. It now seems that

this was the decisive attack, for the next evening, Wednesday the 28th, Dundonald with two mounted regiments was in Ladysmith, and to-day Sir Redvers Buller with his Army Corps moved forwards towards Nelthorpe, the last railway station before Ladysmith.

On Wednesday morning Sir Redvers Buller reported a considerable force of the enemy still on and under Bulwana Mountain, to the east of Ladysmith. His task and that of his Army Corps is to inflict what damage he can upon that force of the enemy, taking from Sir George White whatever assistance that officer and his troops can give, and leaving to the auxiliary services the work of attending to the sick and wounded in Ladysmith and the provisioning of the troops and the town. A part of Sir George White's force is, no doubt, still fit for action so soon as its supply of cartridges can be renewed. The most effective plan would probably be to leave a strong rear-guard at Nelthorpe, and to push on with the main body and the bulk of the artillery through

Ladysmith to the assault of one of the Boer positions on the north side of the town. This would compel the Boers to abandon Bulwana, perhaps to leave behind their heavy guns; would, if successful, prevent their retreat by the direct road into the Free State, and might greatly embarrass or, at least, harass their retreat through the Biggarsberg.

The defeat of the Boer army in Natal and the relief of Ladysmith is a great blow to the Boer cause. It frustrates the hopes of the Boers for the one great success on which they were to some extent justified in counting, and makes an end of their plan of campaign.

A few days will be needed to repair the railway from the Tugela to Ladysmith, and to build a temporary railway bridge at Colenso. By that time the force of Sir George White and Sir Redvers Buller will be rested, refreshed, and reorganised, forming an army of from thirty-five thousand to forty thousand men. In the Free State Lord Roberts has probably forty-five

thousand. The collapse of the Boer invasion of Cape Colony points to the early reopening of the railways from Naauwpoort and Sterkstrom to Norval's Pont and Bethulie, the repair of the railway bridges over the Orange River, and the concentration at Bloemfontein of sixty thousand men, with the railway from the Orange River working and guarded behind them, possibly with a new line of railway from Modder River or Kimberley to Bloemfontein as an additional resource. The advance of Lord Roberts with sixty thousand men to the Vaal River must open to Sir Redvers Buller the passes of the Drakensberg range from Van Reenen's to Lang's Nek, and between the two forces the Boer army must be crushed. The Boers may abandon the attempt at resistance by battle, and may confine themselves to the defence of Pretoria, to raids on the British communications, and to the various devices of irregular warfare. But the British forces will shortly have at their disposal as many mounted men as the Boers, so that even irregular

warfare can but lead to their destruction in detail.

The only hope for the Boer cause now rests upon the intervention of other Powers, and the crucial moment for the British Government is at hand. That the Nation is resolved to brook no intervention is absolutely certain, and that it is ready to make great sacrifices and great efforts to resist any attempt at intervention seems equally beyond doubt. Has the Government appreciated either the needs of the situation or the temper of the Nation? Intervention if offered will be proposed suddenly, and foreign action, if it is contemplated at all, will follow upon the heels of the rejection of the proposals. If, then, fleets have still to be completed for sea, plans of campaign to be matured and adopted, and a Volunteer Army to be improvised, the great war will find us as unready and as much surprised as did the supposed small war five months ago.

The measures required are, first of all, to settle the distribution of fleets for all eventualities,

to commission every ship in the navy and to have all the fleets ready in their intended stations, so that only an order by cable may be needed to set them to work; secondly, to have all the coast defences manned and ready; thirdly, to have the volunteer brigades encamped in the defensive positions round London, for which they are destined; and, lastly, but not least, to have the rest of the forces at home encamped near great railway centres as field divisions of regulars, field divisions of militia, and field divisions of volunteers, with ammunition, transport and supplies attached to them. If these measures had already been carried out there would be no intervention. If they are now carried out without loss of time, intervention may be prevented. If they are much longer postponed intervention becomes probable; the great war may be expected, and no man can foretell whether the British Empire, if again taken by surprise and unready, can weather the storm.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE BOER POWER

March 8th, 1900

LORD ROBERTS yesterday defeated the Boers near Poplar's Drift. In order to measure the importance of the event it may be well to begin by a rough general survey of the condition of affairs.

There have long been signs that the Boer Power was subjected to a very great strain by the effort made to hold, against ever-increasing British forces, a number of points upon the circumference of a very large area. The Boers were attacking Mafeking and Kimberley, and covering their action at both points by forces intended to delay the relieving columns. They were also endeavouring to support rebellion throughout a great tract of country in the Cape Colony, extending from Prieska on the west to the Basuto border on the east, and covering the rebels by parties posted to resist the advance of Gatacre and French along the railways from the south coast to the Orange River. These

two groups of enterprises were but the subordinate features of a campaign in which the principal undertaking was the reduction of Ladysmith, which involved a prolonged and stubborn resistance to the repeated assaults of Sir Redvers Buller.

Thus the Boer Governments, or their commander-in-chief, set out at the beginning to do many things at the same time. There were few British troops in the country, and there was the possibility of great success, at least in the shape of the occupation of territory, before the British forces could be assembled. But shortly after the arrival of Sir Redvers Buller's Army Corps it began to be evident that the Boer forces were balanced by the British. There was a pause in the movements. The British made little headway and the Boers none. Yet, as both sides were doing their best, it was clear that the Boers required the utmost exertion of all their energies to maintain the equilibrium. This condition may be said to have lasted from about the middle of December to the middle of February. During

those two months, however, while the Boers were at full tension, the British were gathering new forces behind their front line, which itself was all the time receiving gradual accessions of strength.

When Lord Roberts with fifty thousand men burst through the Boer cordon and destroyed the force with which Cronje had been covering the siege of Kimberley, the Boers had no reserve of force with which to fill up the gap. Every man sent to Cronje's assistance had to be taken from some other post where he was sorely needed. The detachments sent from Natal into the Free State left the Natal Army, already wearied by its long unsuccessful siege of Ladysmith, and by Buller's persistent attacks, too weak to continue at once the siege and the resistance to Buller. But the two tasks were inseparable, and when Buller renewed his attack and drove the Boers from their posts south of the Tugela, the Boer army of Natal found itself able to cover its retreat only by a last desperate rearguard action at Pieters.

Defeat in the Free State and collapse in Natal were accompanied by the abandonment of the effort to support the rebellion in Cape Colony.

This general breakdown following upon prolonged over-exertion, and accompanied in the two principal regions by complete defeat, must have had its effects on the spirits of the troops. Hope must be gone and despair at hand, and the consequent diminution of power is sure to be considerable. There is no sign as yet of any strong leadership such as could to some extent restore the fortunes of the Boer army. The retreat beyond the Orange River has been gradual; the siege of Mafeking has not been abandoned, and there is no sign of a determined concentration of forces to oppose Lord Roberts.

Since the surrender of Cronje on February 27th, Lord Roberts has been completing his supplies, and probably making good the damage to his transport caused by the loss of a convoy on the Riet River. He has also brought up the Guards Brigade as a reinforcement. A few

days ago the camp was moved forward from Paardeberg to Osfontein, and beyond Osfontein the Boers were observed collecting their troops from day to day and extending their position, which ran roughly north and south across the Modder. Yesterday Lord Roberts advanced to the attack with three and a half infantry divisions, a cavalry division and a brigade of mounted infantry. The cavalry, followed by an infantry division, turned the enemy's left flank, and by noon the enemy's army was in full retreat towards the north and east, pursued by the British. The Boers have this time not ventured to stand to fight. They have seen themselves assailed in front by a force which must have greatly outnumbered them at the same time that their flank was turned by a force as mobile as their own. Their precipitate retreat coming after their late defeats must increase their demoralisation, and it will hardly be practicable for them to make a fresh stand east of the Free State Railway. Lord Roberts will be

on the railway with the bulk of his force by Saturday or Sunday, and his presence there will complete the break up of the Boer defences of the Orange River.

The situation of the Boers is now, as far as it depends on themselves, desperate. They can hardly collect forty thousand men for a decisive battle, and are confronted by two armies, each of which has that strength, the one nearing Bloemfontein, the other at Ladysmith. Lord Roberts, when he reaches the railway, will probably call up from the Orange River such additional forces as are not required as garrisons in Cape Colony. His numbers can be fed by constant small reinforcements, while the Boers have no means of increasing their numbers. With each succeeding week, therefore, the British will grow stronger and the Boers fewer. The utmost that the Boer commander-in-chief can expect to accomplish is to delay that advance to Pretoria which he cannot prevent.

He may perhaps bring about the fall of

Mafeking, if he chooses to dispense for a few weeks longer with the reinforcements which Commandant Snyman by raising the siege could bring to his main army. There was indeed some days ago an unofficial report that a strong column was moving north from Kimberley. If that were true the destination of the column must have been Makeking, but it is not clear what its composition could be. The Guards Brigade being at Poplar's Drift there would be left the other brigade of the first division, and that may be on its way towards the north. Resistance was expected at the passage of the Vaal at Fourteen Streams, but that point must have already been reached. Probably nothing will be heard of this column until it has accomplished its task, except in the not very probable event of hard fighting between Winsorton and Mafeking. Colonel Baden-Powell is known to be very hard pressed, being short of provisions and of troops. It is certain the column will make every effort to reach Mafeking in time, but the distance is great. The

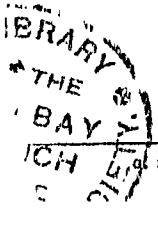
best chance of success would be found in the despatch of a large body of mounted troops to move in the fashion of the great raiding expeditions of the American Civil War; but it is doubtful whether sufficient mounted troops were or are available.

Apart from their own resources the Boers may hope for help from outside. They have from the beginning looked for the intervention of some great Power, for the assistance of the Dutch party at the Cape, and for such action by the British Opposition as might embarrass the Government in its resolve to prosecute the war to its logical conclusion.

Intervention will not be undertaken by any Power that is not prepared to go to war, and does not see a fair prospect of success in an attack upon the British Empire. Intervention therefore will be prevented if the Navy is kept ready for any emergency, and if the Government measures for arming the Nation are so carried out as to convince continental Powers that they

will produce an appreciable result. That conviction does not yet exist, but it is not too late to create it.

The Cape Dutch will not be able to embarrass a British Government that knows its own mind and is resolved to treat them fairly while asserting its authority in the Transvaal and the Free State. The peace at any price party at home is trying hard to press its false doctrines, but in the present temper of the Nation has no chance of success, provided only that the Government carries out without hesitation or vacillation the policy to which it is by all its action committed, of bringing the territories of the Boer Republics under British administration so soon as the military power of the Boers has been broken.



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